

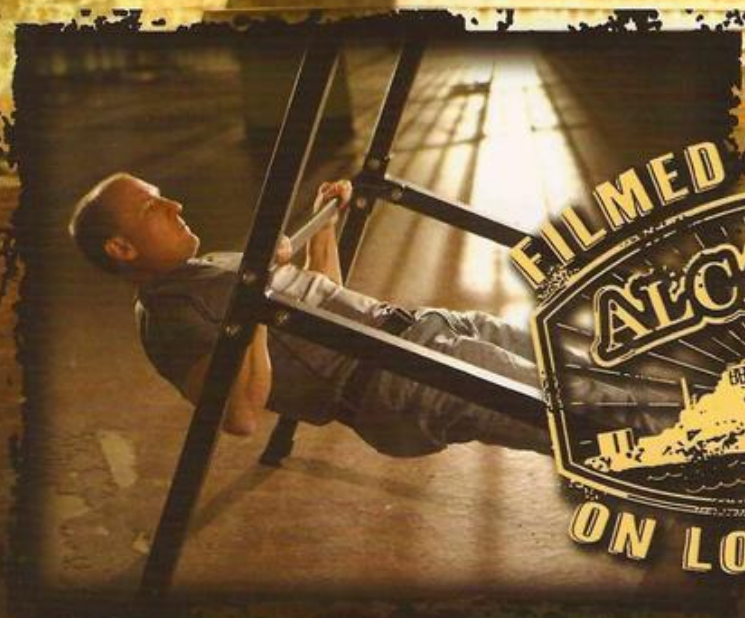


CONVICT CONDITIONING

VOLUME V:

MAXIMUM STRENGTH:
THE ONE-ARM PULLUP SERIES

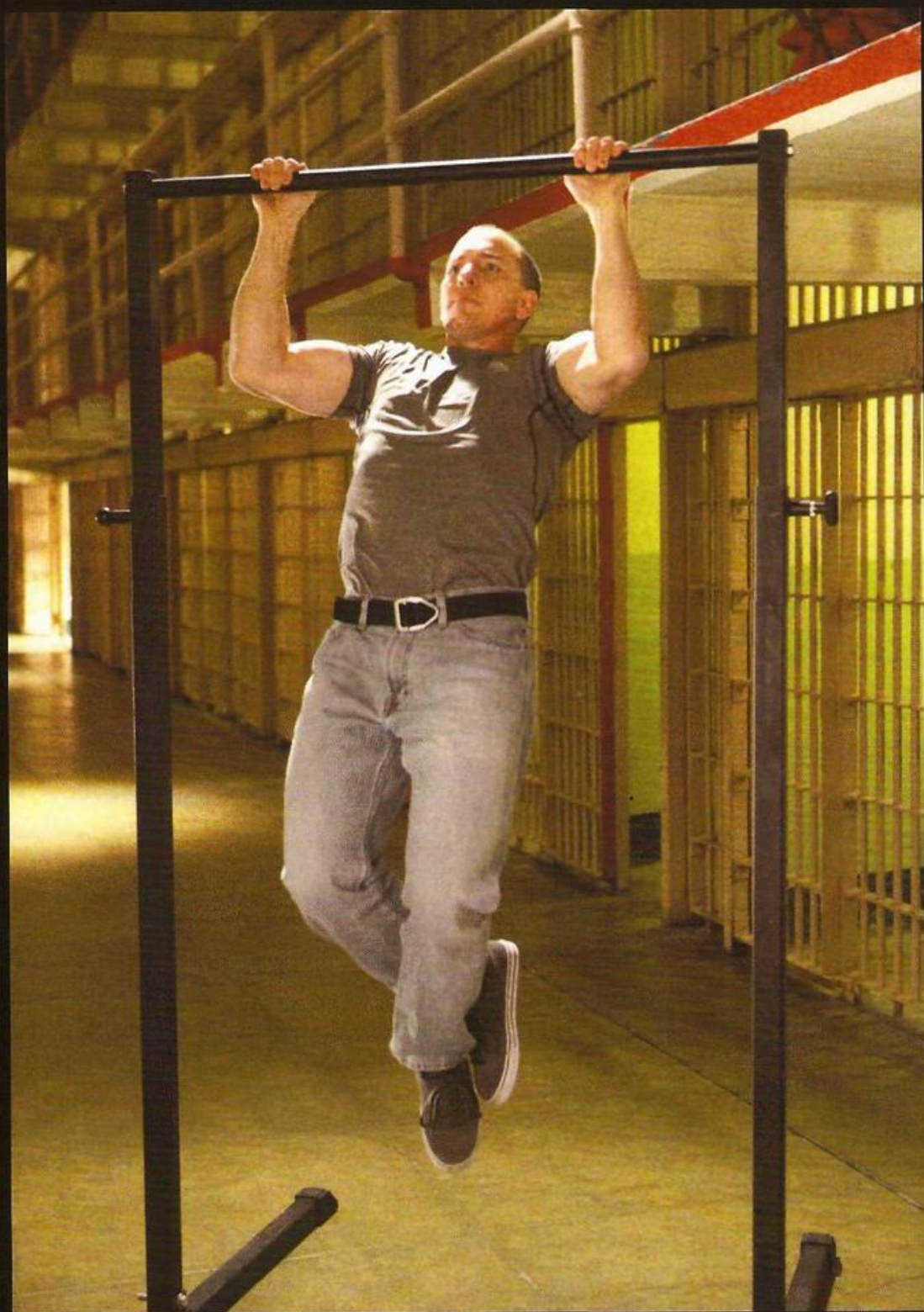
WITH BRETT JONES
AND MAX SHANK



FILMED ENTIRELY
AT
ALCATRAZ
ON LOCATION AT

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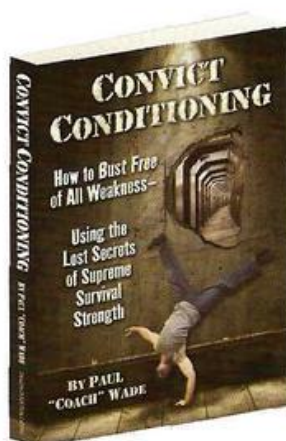
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CELL 1:
PULLUP
THEORY

NUMBER FOUR:

Pullups are very safe. Most acute injuries in the gym occur to the spine and particularly the lower back area. A lot of these come from back training, and bending over while holding weights—deadlifts, rows and cleans can cause a lot of injuries this way. But because your feet are off the ground during harder pullups, there's minimal force going through your spine. Your chances of a lower back injury during pullups are virtually zilch.



We could go on, but that's a pretty impressive list. If you want more information on pullup theory and anatomy, refer to the *Convict Conditioning* book, chapter seven. The bottom line: The pullup is the number-one upper back, bicep and pulling exercise. If it's not a part of your routine, you should include it—today! We're going to help you do just that.



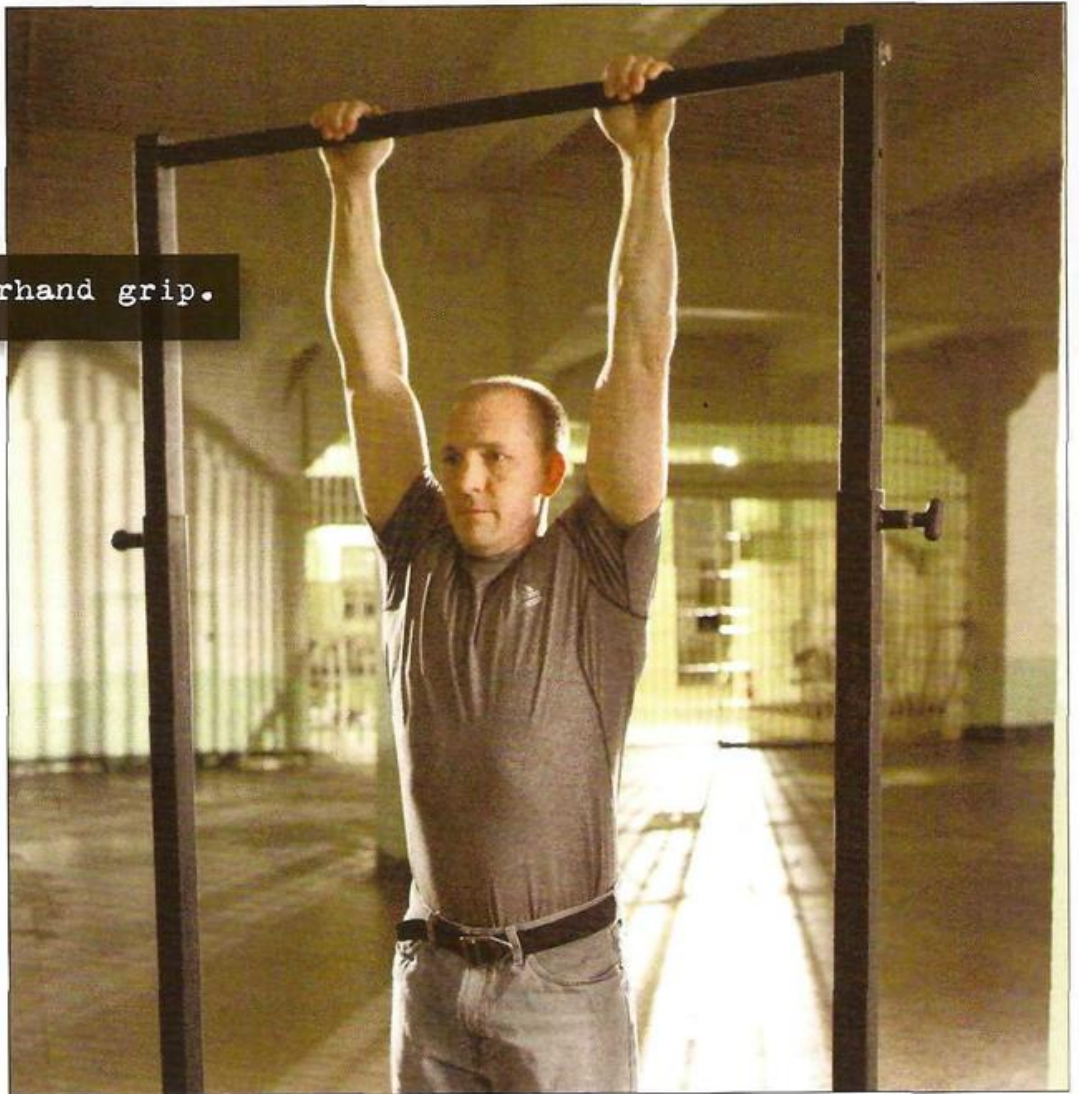
THE TEN PULLUP COMMANDMENTS

If you've viewed any of the other DVDs in this series, you'll know that before we launch into the ten major exercises you need to learn, we take a few minutes to examine the most important technical points behind the movements we'll be performing. This is crucial to understanding; for many athletes, these technical points are the most important aspect of these DVDs—it's what they take away and actually work with, in the gym or at home, to improve their own performance in pullups. Pullups aren't just a matter of pulling your body up and down; there are some fundamental technical points which, if you apply them properly, will really accelerate your training and help you unlock your strength much faster than athletes who mindlessly perform their reps. This is the black belt class. Let's take a look at ten important ideas for pullup training.

COMMANDMENT I: NATURAL GRIP!

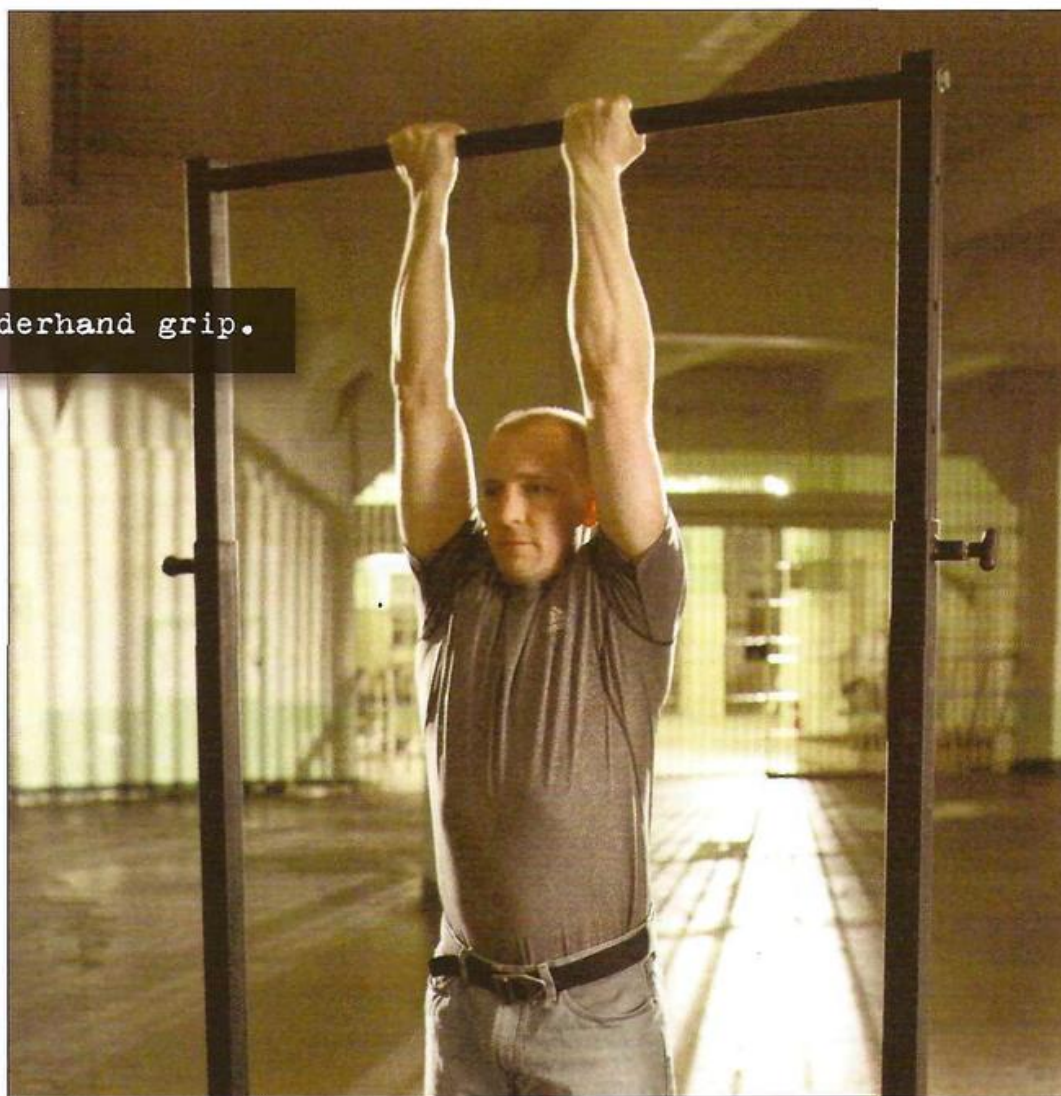
When you step up to do pullups, the first thing you have to consider is how you hold the bar. The best option is to use whatever grip seems the most natural to you. Most athletes use an overhand grip, with their palms facing away from them.

Overhand grip.

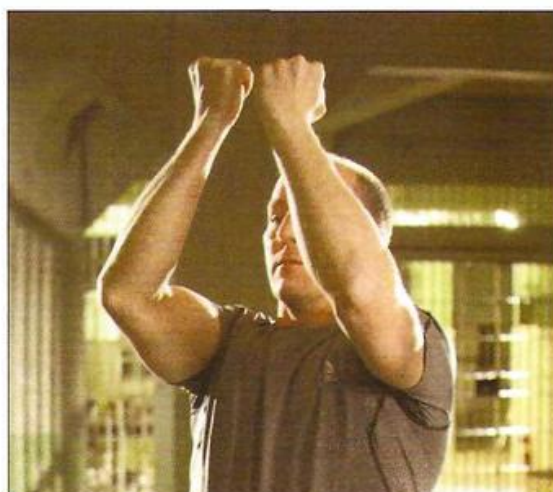


Some prefer an underhand grip, with the palms opposite the face.

Underhand grip.

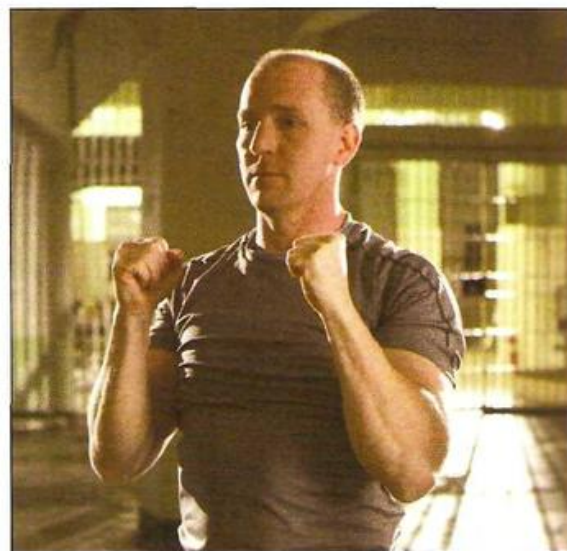


Experiment, and discover what seems most natural, whichever has the best groove for your body-type. When you perform pulling motions, many athletes find that their hands tend to pronate—which just means that the palms want to turn away from your body a little. You might be able to feel this if you try close grip pullups with an underhand grip; the closer you pull, the more you feel your thumbs want to turn towards you.



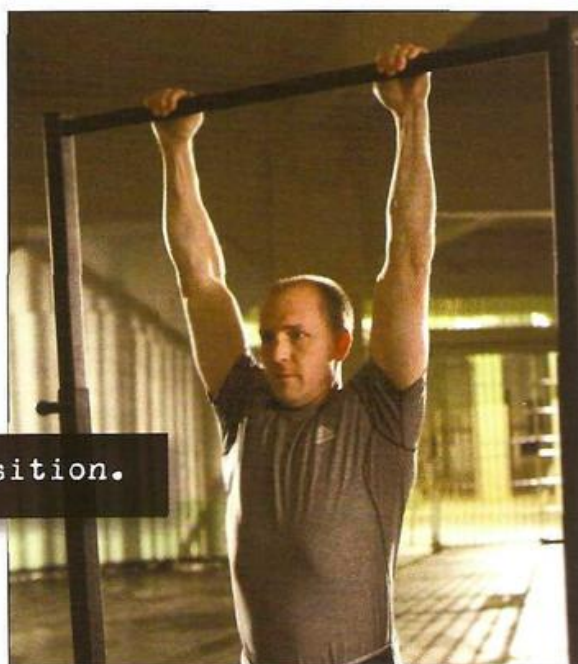
This effect means that one of the best grips for more advanced pullups involves a slight angle. So see if you can find a cambered pullup bar, or even a station that allows you to perform pullups with a hammer grip, which means the palms face each other.

Using hanging rings is also a great option, because it allows the hands to pronate freely; but be aware that hanging rings require a lot of extra strength because you need to stabilize their movement. The bottom line: get doing pullups and experiment. Use what works for you—even if it's different for each exercise.



COMMANDMENT 2: TOP STARTING!

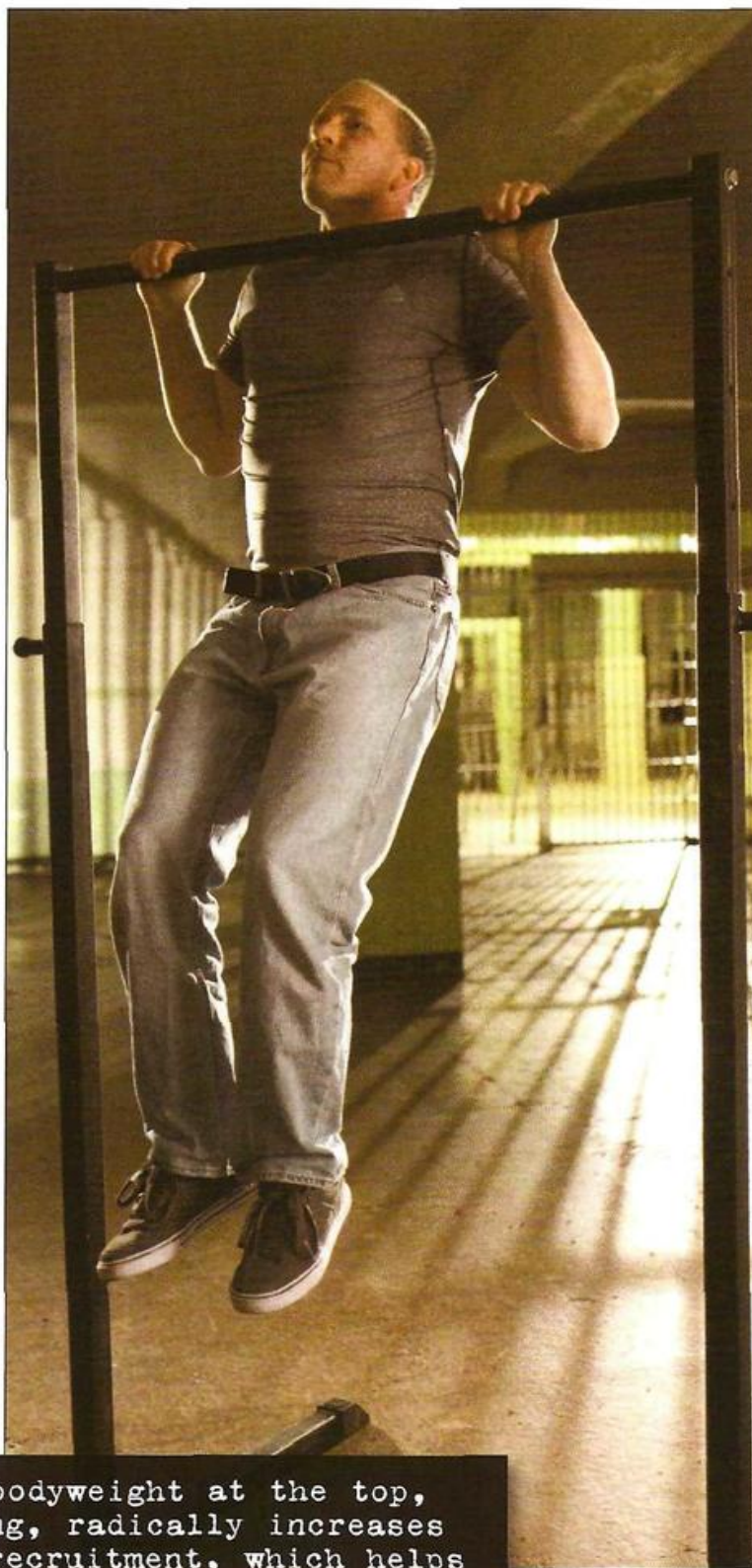
Many athletes begin their pullups from the bottom, like this.



Bottom position.

In Convict Conditioning, you're advised to begin your set from the top position, with your chin *over* the bar, like so.

This method improves performance, especially at the beginning of a set. Try it for yourself. Pick a hard pullup variation, one that you can barely do a few reps with. If you begin in the hanging position, you'll often find that it's a real struggle to pull yourself up; but if you start with your chin already over the bar, then lower yourself, you'll find it much easier to pull yourself back up. It's as if descending from the top is like compressing a spring...you go all the way down, and bang! You have the energy to snap back up. This works because the act of holding your bodyweight at the top, then descending, radically increases neurological recruitment, which helps you find the strength to get back up. You'll notice this technique is particularly helpful later on, when you're working more advanced types of pullups. So get into this habit from day one. It doesn't matter if you have to stand on a chair, or jump up to the bar, but always start your set from the top position.



Holding your bodyweight at the top, then descending, radically increases neurological recruitment, which helps you find the strength to get back up.

COMMANDMENT 3: SHOULDERS TIGHT!

When you perform any compound calisthenics exercise with your arms, like pullups, it's really important to keep your shoulders "tight". What does this mean? It means pulling the tops of your shoulders—the sockets—into your torso, and keeping them there. This isn't a huge movement; when your arms are out, just tighten your back and lats to pull your shoulders down an inch or two.

This is a fundamental strength drill to learn. Your shoulders consist of ball-and-socket joints. Unlike hinge joints, like your knees, or gliding joints, like your wrists, your shoulders aren't structurally *locked* into place. They are only held into place by a complex network of ligaments and soft tissue. Some athletes and bodybuilders like to fully extend their shoulders when they straighten their arms under load, almost like they are stretching their shoulders out. This is a mistake. When you do pullups, or lift heavy weights, and allow your shoulders to stretch out under load, you increase the chance of dislocation, and risk irritating or injuring the soft tissue and tendons holding the shoulder in place. When you keep your shoulders down tight, the delicate joint becomes automatically stabilized and protected by a thick corset of muscle. So keep your shoulders tight when you train, especially during pullups.

COMMANDMENT 4: "SOFT" ELBOWS!

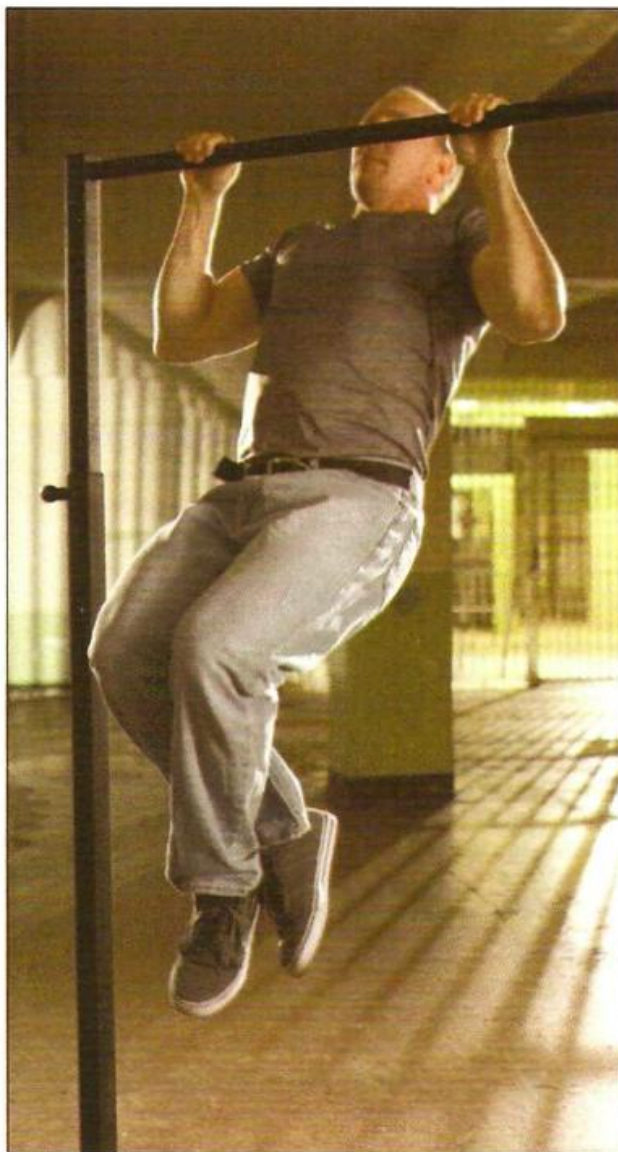
Often you hear about athletes performing "straight-arm", or "long-arm" pullups; meaning that they descend all the way until their arms are straight. Although you should perform most of your pullups using a full range-of-motion, when you hear that your arms should be straight, that's doesn't mean that the elbows are locked. Locking your elbows under a heavy load can cause the joints to pinch, leading to soft tissue irritation, or even the chance of hyperextension of the joint. This is just as true for pullups as it is for pushups. So at the bottom of a pullup, straighten your arms, but always leave a slight kink at your elbows.

This trick is called keeping your elbows “soft”. It retains muscular tension in the arms, and will protect your joints over the long-term. But don’t use this as an excuse to only use half a range of motion during exercises that are a full range of motion! A very slight kink is all you need.

COMMANDMENT 5: SET YOUR LEGS!

There are very few “isolation” exercises in proper bodyweight strength training. True strength requires the whole body to some degree—the body is a chain, a system. So you should work your entire body, in some way, with every single movement you do. The same is true for pullups. Even though pullups are mainly an upper body exercise—focusing on the arms and back—the whole body needs to be moved, so the waist and legs need to find a place, too. Because the midsection supports the waist, many novices get sore abs from pullups; because most people aren’t used to holding the legs off the ground in everyday life. So when performing pullups, don’t just look at what your hands and arms are doing. Take your lower body posture seriously, too. Ideally, keep everything tight; stomach, hips and legs. You’ll begin noticing how important this is during the first three pullup steps, where some of the body’s weight is passing through the spine and lower body. Once you’re performing the hanging exercises, keeping the legs together and the ankles looped behind you is a great way to keep your lower body locked into position.

This not only keeps your entire body braced as a system, it also goes a long way to eliminate cheating. From your first proper pullup, learn how to set your legs correctly.

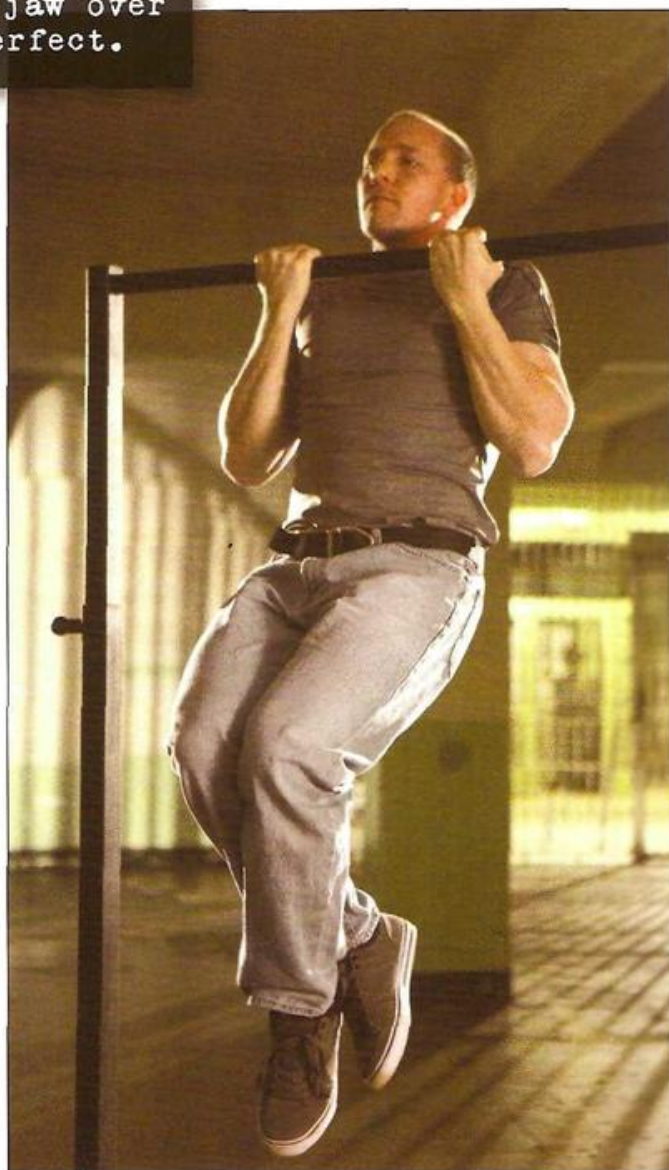


COMMANDMENT 6: CHIN OVER!

Getting your jaw over the bar is perfect.

There are a lot of opinions on just how high you should lift your body during pullups. Some people say lift until your chest touches the bar, until your eyes go over the bar, or whatever. The best indicator, and the one most often used in prison training, is the chin. When your chin passes over the bar, you've performed a rep. Like this.

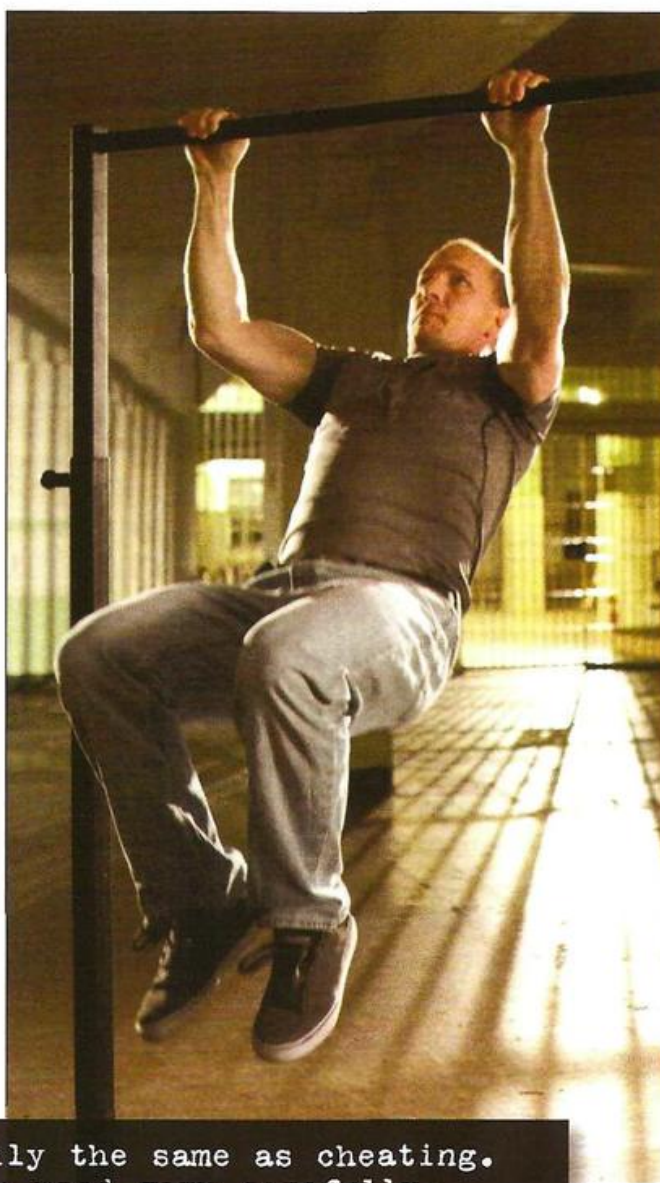
Any less and the muscles aren't worked to the full range. Pulling even higher—until the chest or even the sternum touch the bar—is harder, but it limits your ultimate strength potential, because it shifts the focus of the exercise from the stronger lateral muscles to the smaller mid-back muscles. You don't need to go this high. Getting your jaw over the bar is perfect.



COMMANDMENT 7: KIPPING!

One way to make pullups a lot easier is to throw the knees up during a rep. This is called “kipping”.

Kipping generates momentum in the lower body, which translates into less pulling force through the arms. Kipping isn't necessarily the same as cheating. Kipping is a tool to be used very carefully. It's always a good idea that beginners to Convict Conditioning, or calisthenics generally, avoid kipping as much as possible. During the early stages of training, strict form is necessary to build muscle, “hard-wire” good technique into your nervous system, and protect unprepared joints from jarring forces. But as you become more advanced, it's permissible to use kipping under certain circumstances. Once you're working on step five, full pullups, you can begin to add some kipping reps to the end of a set of strict pullups, when you can't perform pullups strictly anymore. At this stage, kipping should be done to make the set harder—not easier. For at least the first seven steps of the series, you shouldn't count any of your kipping reps towards your progression standard. Once you're at step eight, half one-arm pullups, you can throw some kipping into your technique to allow you to perform the most difficult exercises.

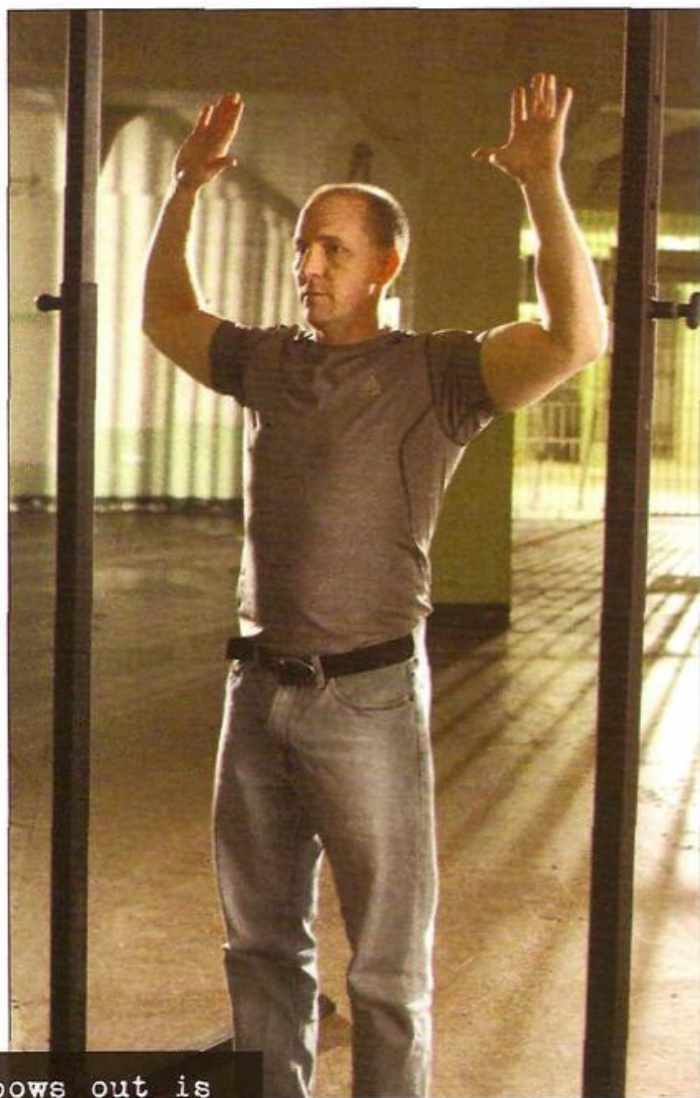


Kipping isn't necessarily the same as cheating.
Kipping is a tool to be used very carefully.

COMMANDMENT 8: NEUTRAL ELBOWS!

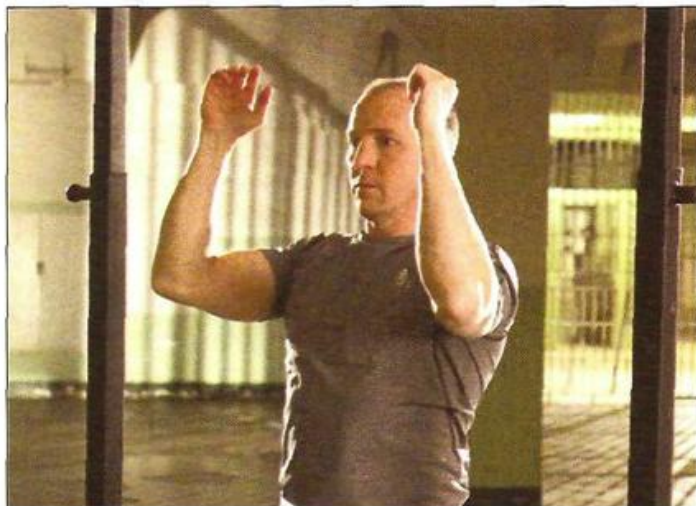
In order to work their torso muscles to the max, a lot of strength athletes and bodybuilders feel the need to keep their elbows jammed out to the side when working out. You commonly see this with bench presses and shoulder presses, but it's something you sometimes see with pullups, too.

Some very strong bodybuilders go so far as to pull themselves up so that the napes of their neck touch the bar before they descend; this really forces the elbows out. It's a lot like the opposite version of a press-behind-neck, where you pull down instead of pushing up. The theory behind flaring your shoulders out is that the exaggerated position forces extra pressure into the shoulders and torso muscles. The reality is different. Pushing your elbows out is unnatural to the body; you protect your joints more and generate more strength when your shoulders are in a neutral position, not necessarily next to the torso, but certainly not jammed out to the side. This is a subject that's covered in depth in chapter ten of the *Convict Conditioning* book. The take home message is that, during pullups, you should allow your elbows to go where they want. This will probably be fairly close to your body, with your elbows pointing out front or diagonal. This kind of position is more natural.



Pushing your elbows out is
unnatural to the body.

When you are doing any pulling or pushing movement, don't force your elbows out to the side. Allow them to go where they naturally want to go, which will be closer to the torso.



COMMANDMENT 9: HOLD IT!

Every exercise has its own unique pattern of movement and cessation of movement. Moving the bodyweight through space is an ideal way to build muscle and power, but holding your position briefly is a good way to increase static strength. In all pullup movements, you're stronger at the top position, with your chin over the bar.

All your pulling muscles are contracted here, so it makes sense to pause for a one count. You don't need to squeeze, tense, or perform any other artificial nonsense like that. Just hold at the top, and your body will do the rest. The bottom position of the pullup, with straight arms, is the hardest. Your muscles are always at their weakest when extended, as any wrestler will tell you. So when you reach the bottom of a rep, make sure you don't bounce, and that all the momentum is gone from your motion, but don't get into the habit of just *hanging* there. All this will do is drain your energy and make the next rep harder. Hold for a one count at the top, and only pause for a split-second to reverse your direction at the bottom of all your pullups.

COMMANDMENT 10: LEAN UP!

This last commandment isn't about pullup technique. It's just a fact of reality all pullup guys have to face at some point. Some strength athletes can be pretty fat, carrying thirty, fifty, or even more excess pounds of body weight. In some cases these guys can move pretty heavy weights, but they'd still be better athletes—faster and stronger—at lighter weights. “Bulking” up is not something a calisthenics master wants or needs to do. This is most easy to see when you look at an exercise like pullups; excess bodyweight is a total drag, and devastates your performance levels. You can learn to do a one-leg squat if you are carrying extra weight, and maybe even a one-arm pushup. But if you are fat and want to become great at pullups, you can forget it. This is because, during pullups, your body has to lift its entire weight. Every extra pound has to come along for the ride. As a result, if you are overweight, training alone is not enough to get you to a high level in the pullup movement. Training and fat loss methods have to go hand in hand. Even losing just ten pounds of blubber will make a big difference to your performance, not just in pullup workouts, but for all your bodyweight exercises. Pay attention to those scales!

CELL 2:
THE
PULLUP
SERIES

Why athletes misunderstand pullups

So if the pullup is so great, why is it that so many trainees are skipping this movement in their routine? Well, there are two reasons. First, a lot of guys—either heavy people or beginners—look at classic pullups and think they're just too tough. These people may not yet be able to pull their own bodyweight. So they get intimidated by this exercise. Coming from the opposite angle, many advanced athletes see the pullup as too easy; they might be able to easily pull their weight with two hands, and turn to barbell exercises to provide more weight. Both these attitudes show a lack of understanding of progressive calisthenics. When these trainees think of a "pullups", they picture the regular two-handed full pullup. In reality, there is more than just one type of pullup. The "pullup" isn't just an exercise, it's a whole *family* of movements. Some of these movements are real easy, and could be done by almost anybody, even total beginners. Some of them are incredibly hard—much harder than the regular pullup—and can only be performed by a handful of the strongest men on the planet.

Convict Conditioning pullups/the ten steps

This is where Convict Conditioning comes in. The Convict Conditioning system takes ten of the best pullup-type movements, and puts these techniques in order of difficulty. You start the system at the bottom, with a real easy exercise. Once you master that technique, you move to the next exercise, which is just a little harder, and so on. These exercises have been broken up into a set of stages, which is sometimes called the "ten steps". This is a key feature of the Convict Conditioning system. Without following some kind of structured, progressive approach, it would be impossible for even the most naturally powerful athlete to achieve incredible feats like assisted pullups and one-arm pullups. Like all big achievements, you need to break these seemingly impossible stunts into chunks.

The "hidden steps"

But don't get led astray by the idea of the "ten steps". Each exercise, each "step" is just a stage. There are actually many more than just *ten* pullup exercises in the system, and you can use as many as you need to progress. For example, in one step you do pullups with your hands about shoulder-width apart. On the next step, to make things harder, you bring your hands close, right next to each other. These form two steps in the series, but in reality if you wanted you could bring your hands in an inch each time you train—so you've turned two exercises, two hand positions, into more than a dozen. Likewise, on assisted pullups you help yourself up by pulling on a towel—but *how* and *where* you grip the towel makes a big difference to the difficulty. So, if you're smart, one exercise can become several exercises, by applying a subtle change. After we show you each exercise, we'll give you an idea of how to discover these "hidden steps". There's a whole lifetime of great training and exercises on this DVD!

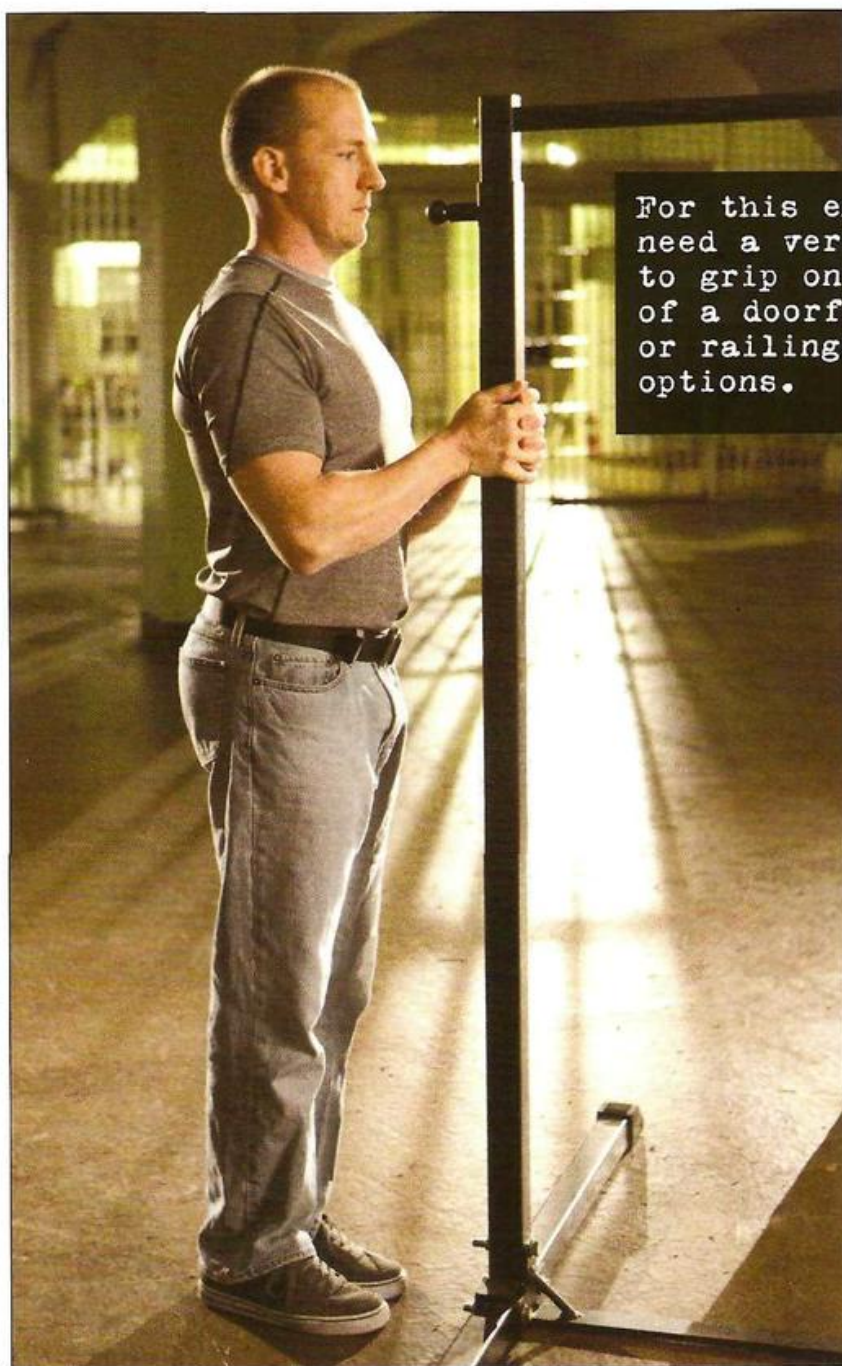
STEP I: VERTICAL PULLS

OVERVIEW

Vertical pulls are a gentle exercise. They are designed for beginners or athletes coming back to calisthenics from shoulder, elbow or bicep injuries or surgery. This exercise very gently conditions the muscles and soft tissues of the biceps, forearms and the rear of the shoulder girdle. It increases blood flow and loosens a tight upper back and shoulders. If you are new to calisthenics—or if your pullups leave a lot to be desired—this technique is a great way to learn the correct pulling groove required for strong pullups. It will teach you how to use your pulling muscles in perfect unison, under a light load.

BASIC POSTURE

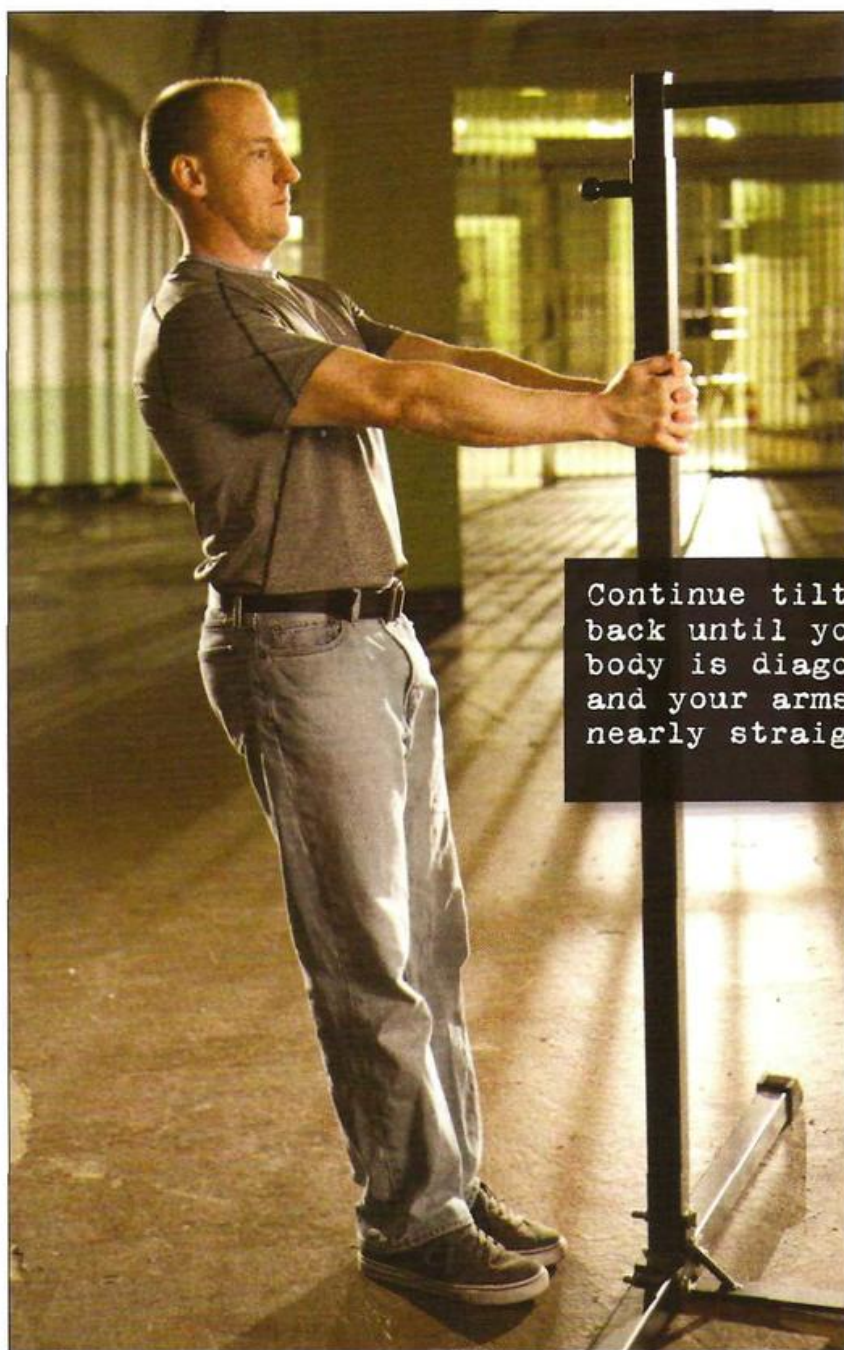
- For this exercise you need a vertical base to grip onto; the edge of a doorframe, bars or railings are good options.
- Stand close to the base with your feet together.
- Grip the vertical base with both hands, at around chest height.



For this exercise you need a vertical base to grip onto; the edge of a doorframe, bars or railings are good options.

NEGATIVE

- Exhale as you smoothly shift your bodyweight back.
- Continue tilting back until your body is diagonal and your arms are nearly straight.
- You should feel a gentle stretch in your upper back.
- Hold this position for a one count.



Continue tilting back until your body is diagonal and your arms are nearly straight.

POSITIVE

- Pull yourself back by contracting your shoulder blades and bending your arms
- Stop when your body is vertical again.
- Pause at the top before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **VERTICAL PULLS**

- Placing your feet further from the vertical base will make the exercise slightly easier
- Placing your feet right next to the wall will make the exercise slightly harder

This should be an exercise most people can explore safely. But it can be made easier or harder by varying your foot position—the further out your feet, the more gentle the exercise.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **VERTICAL PULLS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 40 reps |

Begin this exercise with one set of 10 reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform a strict set of 20, add a second set of 10. Build up to two sets of 20, then add a third set of 10. From there, work up to three sets of 40 before moving to Step 2.

STEP 2: HORIZONTAL PULLS

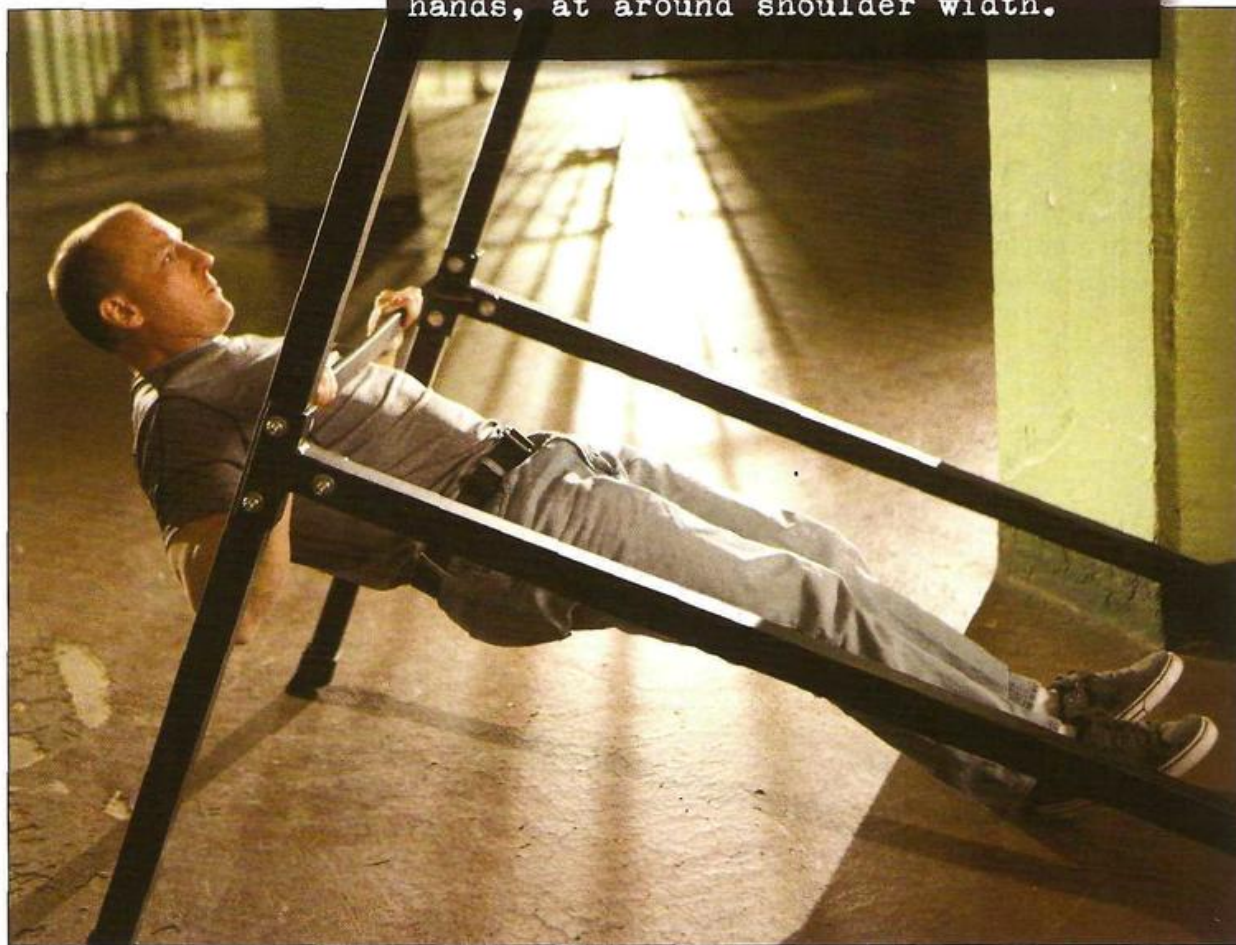
OVERVIEW

Once your body has adapted to vertical pulls, it's time to make your pulling workouts harder. You can easily do this by taking more weight through the hands, and this is achieved by increasing the angle of the body by gripping a *horizontal* base. Horizontal pulls are not as difficult as regular hanging pullups, because some of your body's weight is travelling through the heels. But because the difficulty of this technique depends upon the angle of your body, you can modify this exercise to accommodate a wide variety of difficulty levels, depending on the height of the horizontal base you are pulling from.

BASIC POSTURE

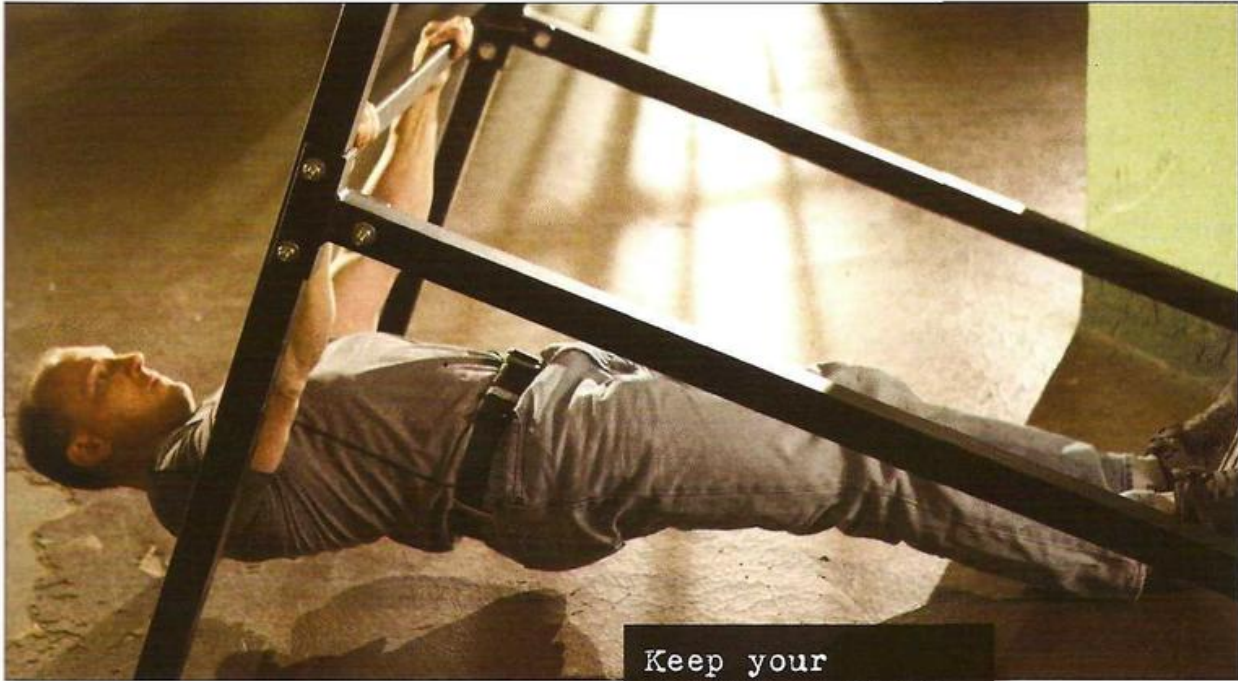
- For this exercise you'll need a horizontal base to pull up towards; a bar set between two pieces of furniture at chest height is a good option.
- Grip the horizontal base with both hands, at around shoulder width.
- Position yourself diagonally under the base, with your arms bent so that your chest touches the base.

Grip the horizontal base with both hands, at around shoulder width.

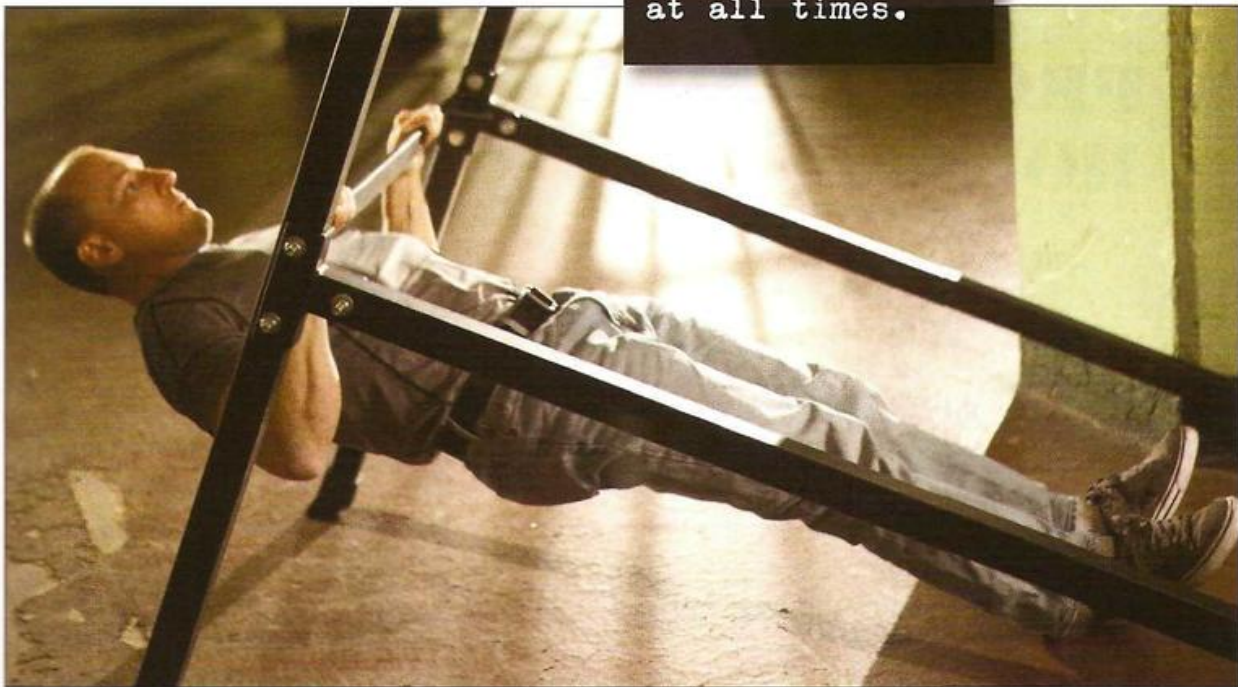


NEGATIVE

- Smoothly lower yourself back down until your arms are nearly straight.
- Keep your shoulders tight at all times.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Keep your
shoulders tight
at all times.



POSITIVE

- Pull yourself up by contracting your shoulder blades and bending your arms.
- Keep your body totally straight as you move.
- Stop when your chest touches the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **HORIZONTAL PULLS**

- Pulling from a higher vertical base will make the exercise easier
- Pulling from a lower vertical base will make the exercise harder

Pulling from a bar at sternum height is about right for this exercise, but as you become stronger you can use lower bases. Strong athletes can perform this exercise for high reps from hip height bases, such as tabletops, but going this low isn't necessary.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **HORIZONTAL PULLS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 20 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 30 reps |

Begin this exercise with one set of 10 reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform a strict set of 20, add a second set of 10. Build up to two sets of 20, then add a third set of 10. From there, work up to three sets of 30 before moving to Step 3.

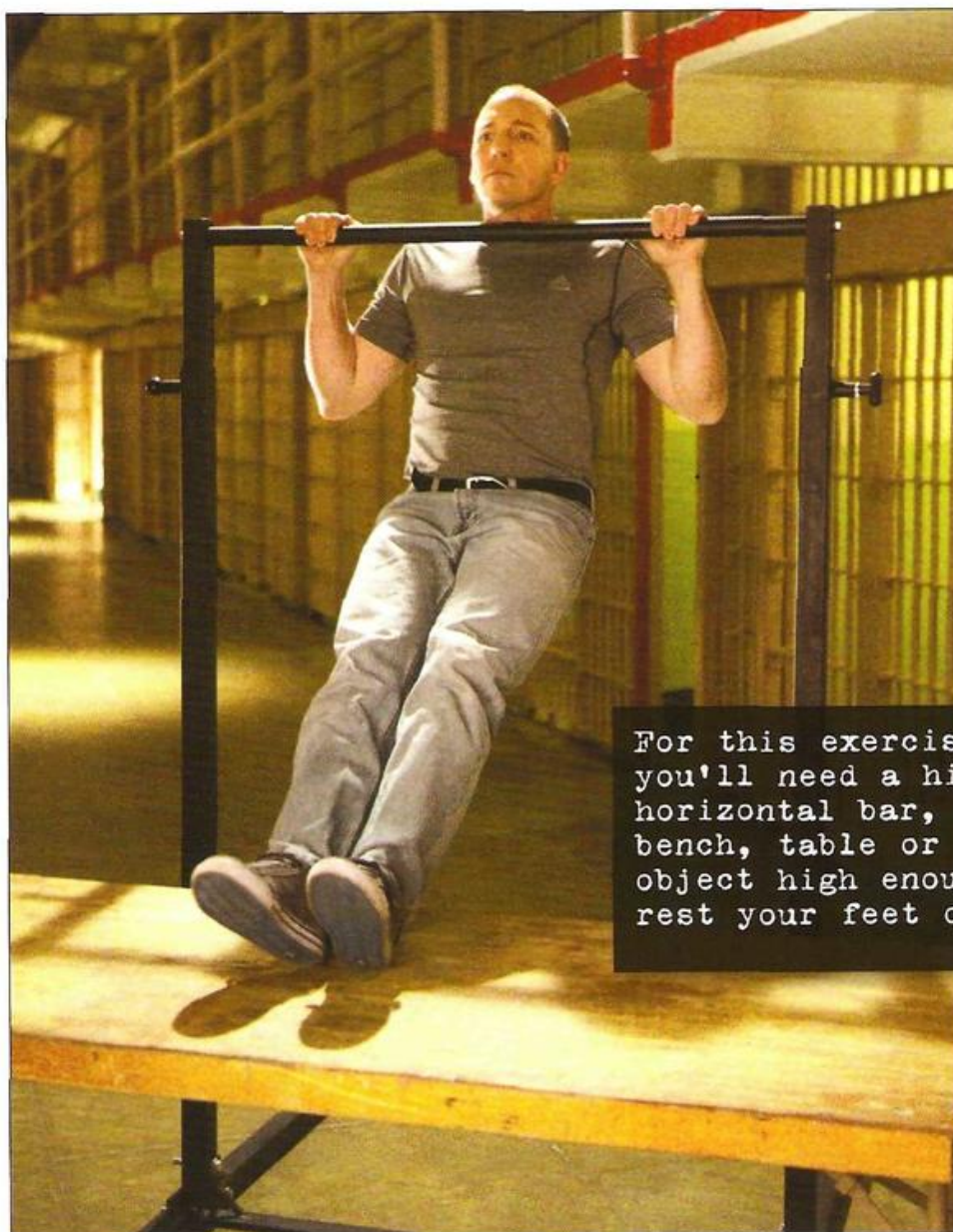
STEP 3: JACKKNIFE PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

Once they've mastered horizontal pulls, athletes should begin working with more basic hanging pulls with the torso straight. The most useful of these is the jackknife pull, or pullup. This is a similar to a regular pullup, but performed with the feet up on an object while in a jackknife position. Putting your feet on something allows you to assist yourself with the pullup by pushing down through the legs, but the jackknife position limits the amount of cheating you can do, which forces you to work harder and will make your pullups stronger.

BASIC POSTURE

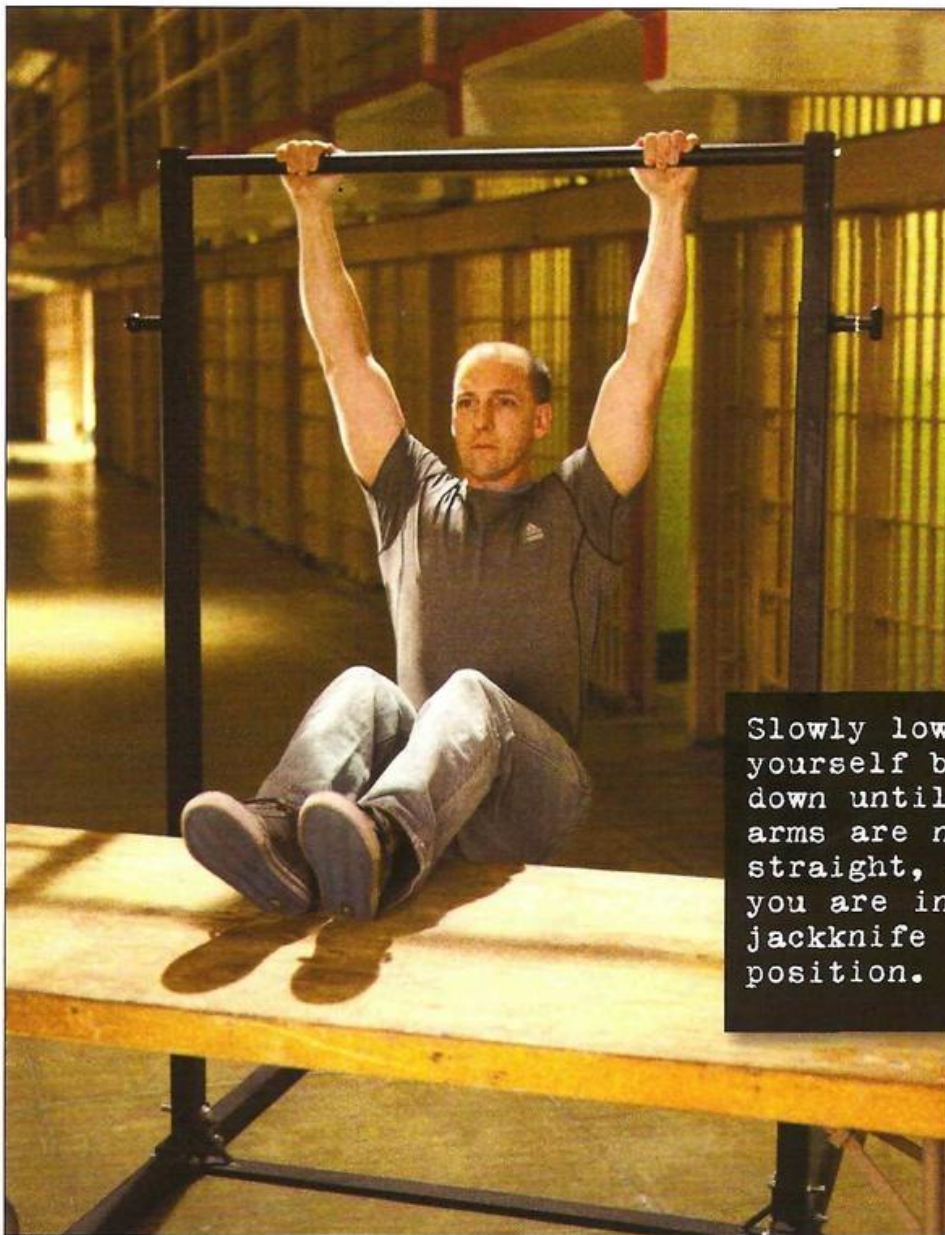
- For this exercise you'll need a high horizontal bar, and a bench, table or object high enough to rest your feet on.
- Grip the bar with a shoulder width grip.
- Begin at the top, with your arms bent and your chin over the bar.
- Swing your legs up onto the lower object so that your heels can rest on it.



For this exercise you'll need a high horizontal bar, and a bench, table or object high enough to rest your feet on.

NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until your arms are nearly straight, and you are in the jackknife position.
- In this position, your torso should be vertical, legs horizontal.
- Keep your shoulders tight at all times.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Slowly lower
yourself back
down until your
arms are nearly
straight, and
you are in the
jackknife
position.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly pull yourself up by bending at the shoulders and arms.
- Push down through your heels to help lift your body up.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **JACKKNIFE PULLUPS**

- Bending your knees and pushing through the heels will make the exercise easier
- Straightening the legs and/or pushing through only one leg will make the exercise harder

You can make this exercise easier or harder as required by pushing more, or less, through the feet. Putting the heels on a lower base tends to make the exercise easier, because you can use the legs more. It's harder to push through the feet when the body is at an acute angle.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **JACKKNIFE PULLUPS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 10 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 15 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 3 sets of 20 reps |

Begin this exercise with one set of 10 reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform a strict set of 15, add a second set of 10. Build up to two sets of 15, then add a third set of 10. From there, work up to three sets of 20 before moving to Step 4.

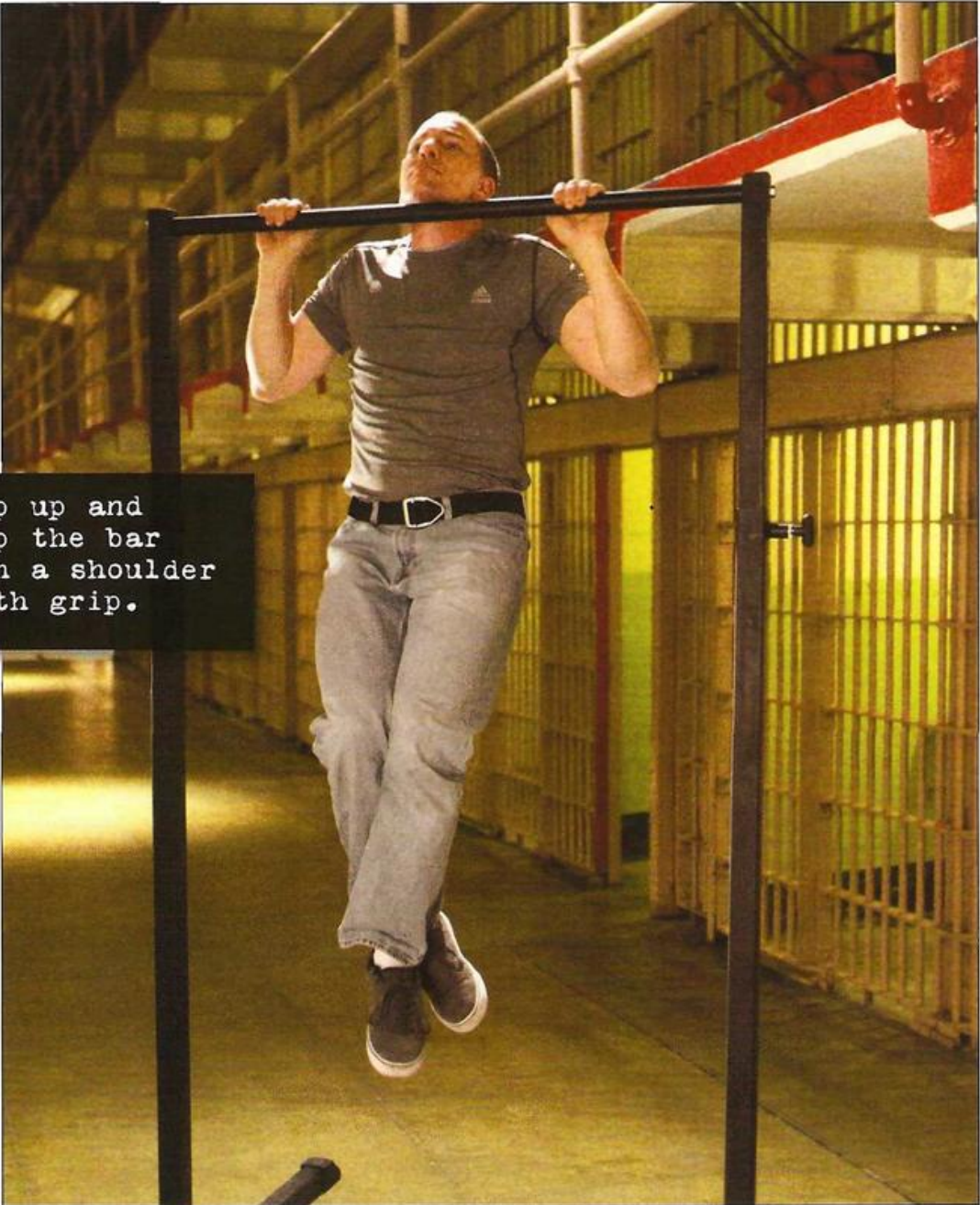
STEP 4: HALF PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

Once you've learned to perform jackknife pullups for the progression standard, your back, shoulders and arms will be strong enough to pull your bodyweight without any further support from the lower body. Unfortunately, many trainees move on to full range pullups and discover that, although they have gained in power, they are still not quite strong enough to comfortably pull themselves out of the long-arm bottom position of the standard full pullup. In half pullups, you only descend halfway down, until your arms are halfway bent. The body is very strong in this position, so half pullups allow you to continue gaining muscle and power in the pullup series, without becoming stuck in the difficult bottom position of full pullups.

BASIC POSTURE

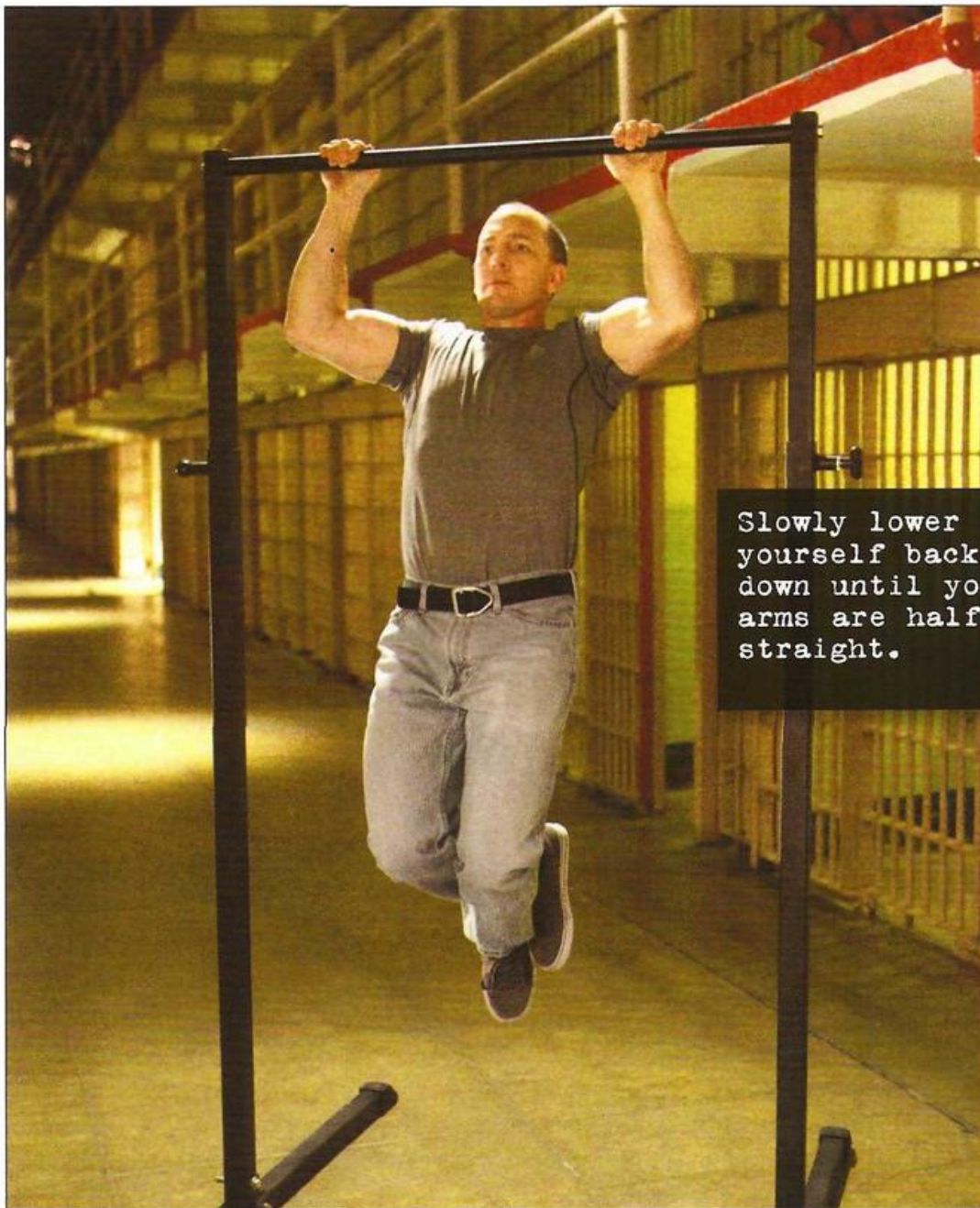
- For this exercise you'll need a sturdy horizontal bar.
- Jump up and grip the bar with a shoulder width grip.
- Set yourself at the top position, with your chin over the bar.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.

A man in a grey t-shirt and light blue jeans is performing a pull-up on a black horizontal bar. He is in the middle of the movement, with his chin above the bar and his feet tucked behind him. The background shows a prison corridor with yellow walls and metal bars.

Jump up and
grip the bar
with a shoulder
width grip.

NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until your arms are halfway straight.
- Only go low enough that your arms are bent at right angles and your upper arms parallel to the floor.
- Pause briefly in the bent-arm position before going back up.



Slowly lower
yourself back
down until your
arms are halfway
straight.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly pull yourself up by bending at the shoulders and arms.
- Don't kick or jerk your legs; keep your lower body as still as possible.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **HALF PULLUPS**

- Reducing the range of motion at the bottom will make the exercise easier
- A greater range of motion, slower negatives and a longer pause at the bottom will all make partial pullups harder

If half pullups are too difficult to perform correctly, reduce your range of motion. Work on quarter range pullups until you get strong enough to go halfway down and back under control.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **HALF PULLUPS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 8 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 11 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 15 reps |

From now on you'll be dropping volume and focusing more on strength. Begin this exercise with one set of 8, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform a strict set of 11, add a second set of 8. Build up to two sets of 15 before moving on to Step 5.



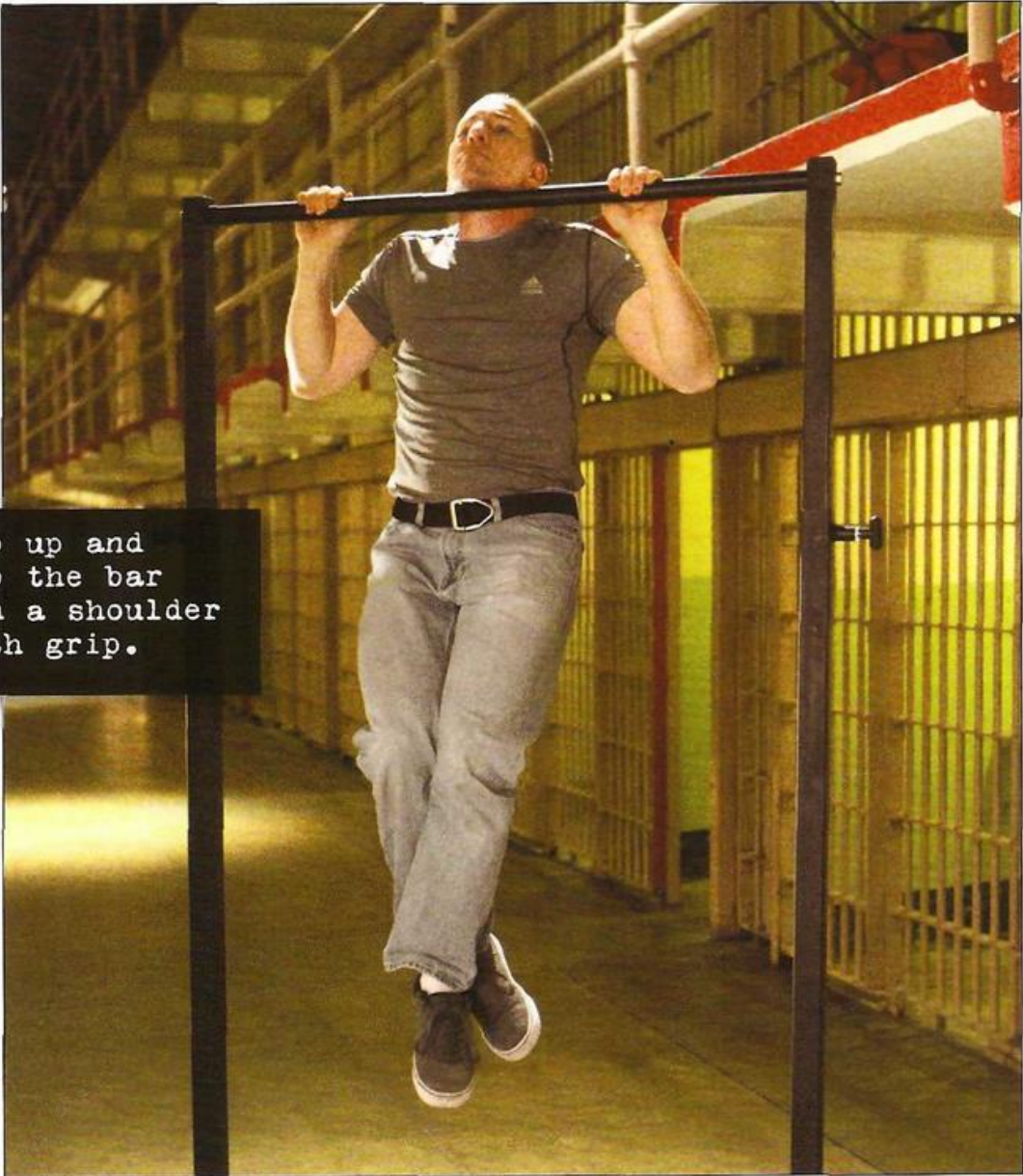
STEP 5: FULL PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

Full pullups are the classic upper back exercise, practiced for muscle and strength since ancient times. Unfortunately, fewer people than ever can perform this exercise due to growing obesity and lack of strength in the modern generation. But if you've followed the course up until this point, your tendons and muscles will be strong enough to allow you to attempt it successfully. Pullups are an important exercise to spend time on if you want to be strong. Pullups not only blow up the large lat muscles of the back, they also build powerful biceps and forearms. They are also a very "functional" movement. Warriors, soldiers and Special Forces athletes all concentrate on this exercise during training, because pulling the bodyweight up is an essential survival strength skill.

BASIC POSTURE

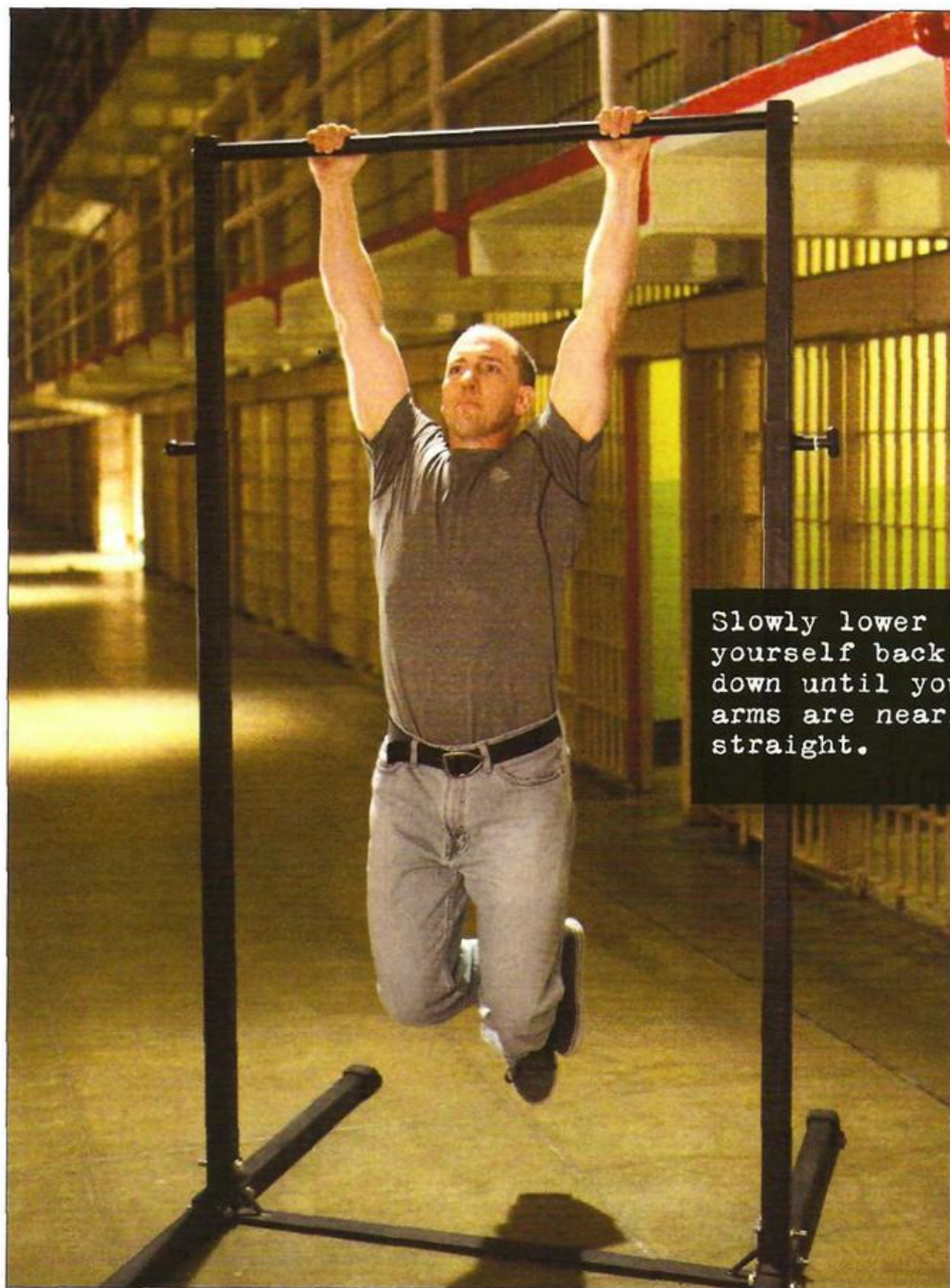
- For this exercise you'll need a horizontal bar high enough to hang from while keeping your feet clear of the ground.
- Take hold of the bar with straight arms and a shoulder width grip.
- Jump up and set yourself at the top position, with your chin over the bar.
- Keep your body braced and your shoulders "tight" at all times.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.



Jump up and grip the bar with a shoulder width grip.

NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until your arms are nearly straight.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Slowly lower
yourself back
down until your
arms are nearly
straight.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly pull yourself back up by bending at the shoulders and arms.
- Don't kick or jerk your legs; keep your lower body as still as possible.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count, before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **FULL PULLUPS**

- If full pullups are too tough, return to half pullups and increase your range of motion until you are performing $\frac{3}{4}$ pullups for the progression standard
- When you achieve this, attempt the full pullup beginner standard again

If you have mastered half pullups, but deep pullups are just too difficult, return to half pullups (Step 4) and begin gradually increasing your range of motion over time.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **FULL PULLUPS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 8 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |

Begin your full pullups training with one set of 5 strict reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform 8 strict reps, add a second set of 5. Build up to two sets of 10 reps, before moving on to Step 6, close pullups.

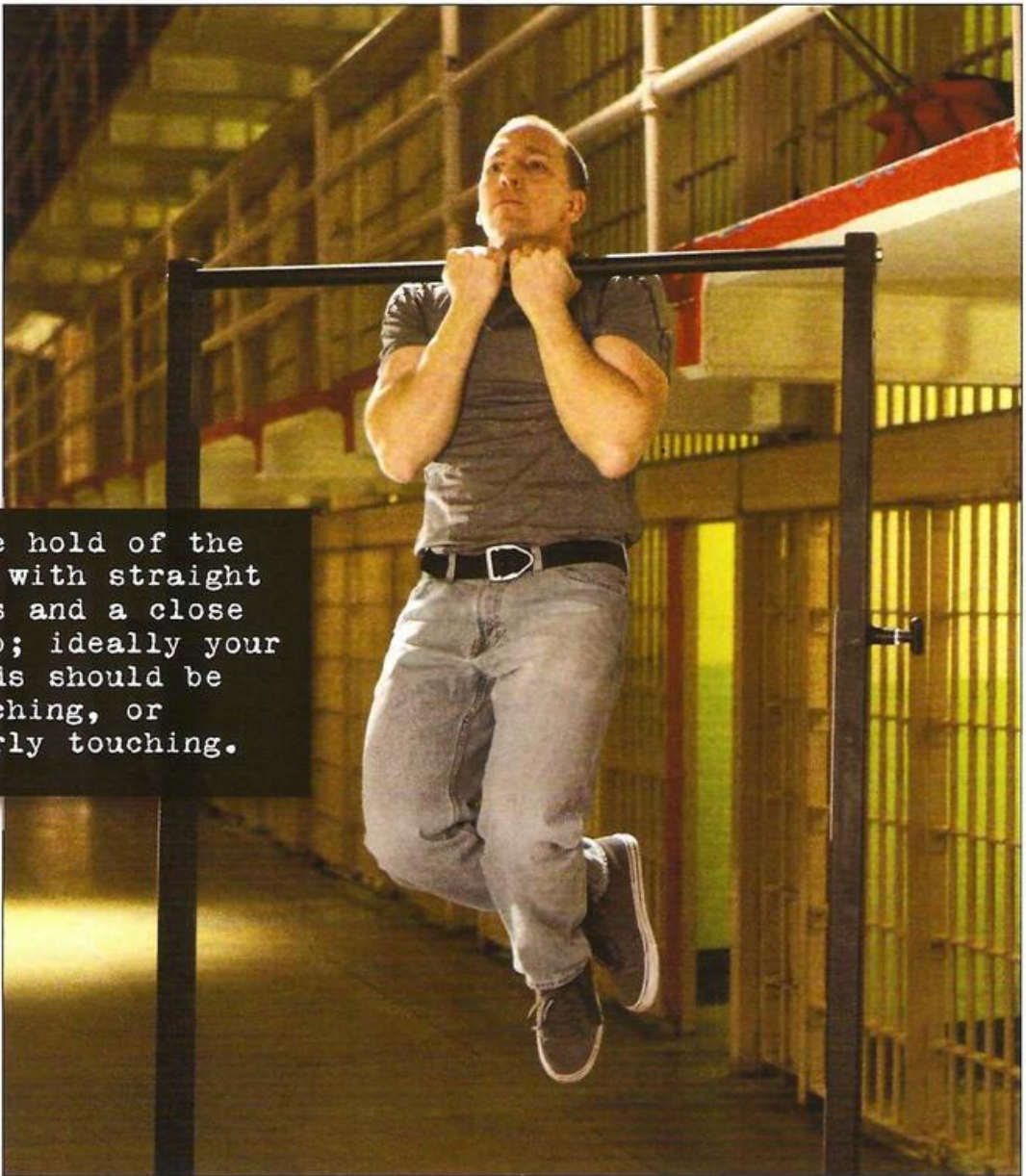
STEP 6: CLOSE PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

Many athletes fail to move beyond the full pullup, because their arm flexors—the biceps and forearm muscles—are too weak to attempt more advanced variations of the exercise. For this reason, once you have mastered the full pullup, the best next step is to spend some time strengthening these areas. This is where close pullups come in. Placing your hands close together on any exercise places biomechanical limitations on the muscles of the shoulders and torso; and, as a result, close grip compound exercises shift much of the workload onto the arms, making these areas much stronger. A course of close pullups will give you the bicep and forearm size and power you need to tackle the more difficult transitional and unilateral pullups which come later in the program.

BASIC POSTURE

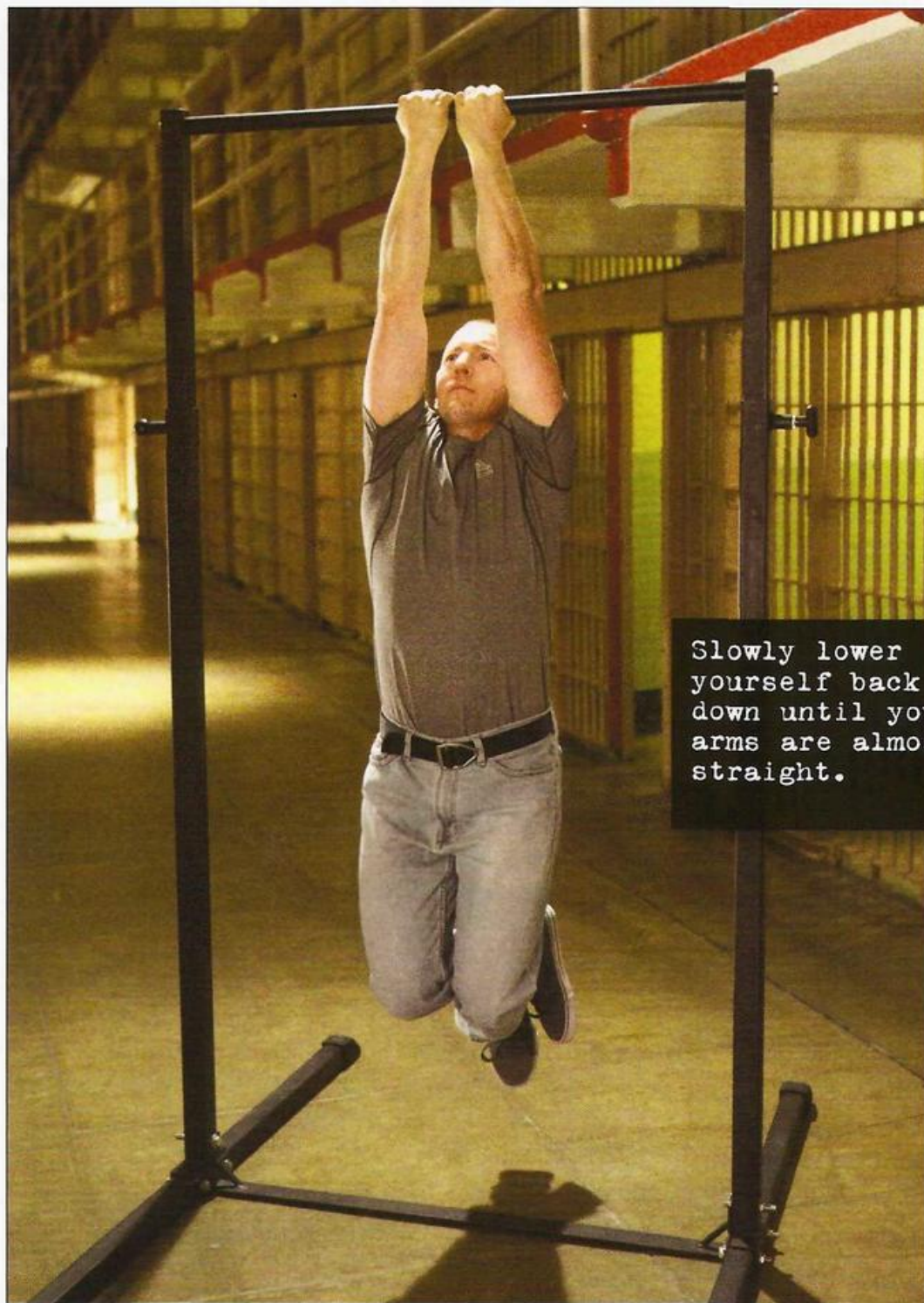
- For this exercise you'll need the same horizontal bar high you used for full pullups.
- Take hold of the bar with straight arms and a close grip; ideally your hands should be touching, or nearly touching.
- Begin at the top position, with your arms bent and your chin over the bar.
- Keep your body braced and your shoulders "tight" at all times.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.

A man in a grey t-shirt and light blue jeans is performing a one-arm pullup on a black horizontal bar. He is in the top position, with his arms bent and his chin over the bar. His feet are looped behind him and are clear of the ground. The background shows a prison interior with yellow walls and metal bars.

Take hold of the bar with straight arms and a close grip; ideally your hands should be touching, or nearly touching.

NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until your arms are almost straight.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Slowly lower
yourself back
down until your
arms are almost
straight.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly pull yourself up by bending at the shoulders and arms.
- Don't kick or jerk your legs; keep your lower body as still as possible.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count, before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **CLOSE PULLUPS**

- If the very close grip is too difficult, return to full pullups and try bringing your hands in by an inch or so and try to meet the progression standard again
- Over time, repeat this procedure, until you are doing close pullups

It's very easy to tailor the difficulty of this exercise to suit your needs. If the jump from full pullups to close pullups is too extreme, just bring your hands in by an inch or so every time you train. This is a great way to gradually work into close pullups.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **CLOSE PULLUPS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 8 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 10 reps |

Start working with this exercise using with one set of 5 strict reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform 8 good reps, it's time to add a second set of 5. Build up to two sets of 10 reps, before moving on to the next step.

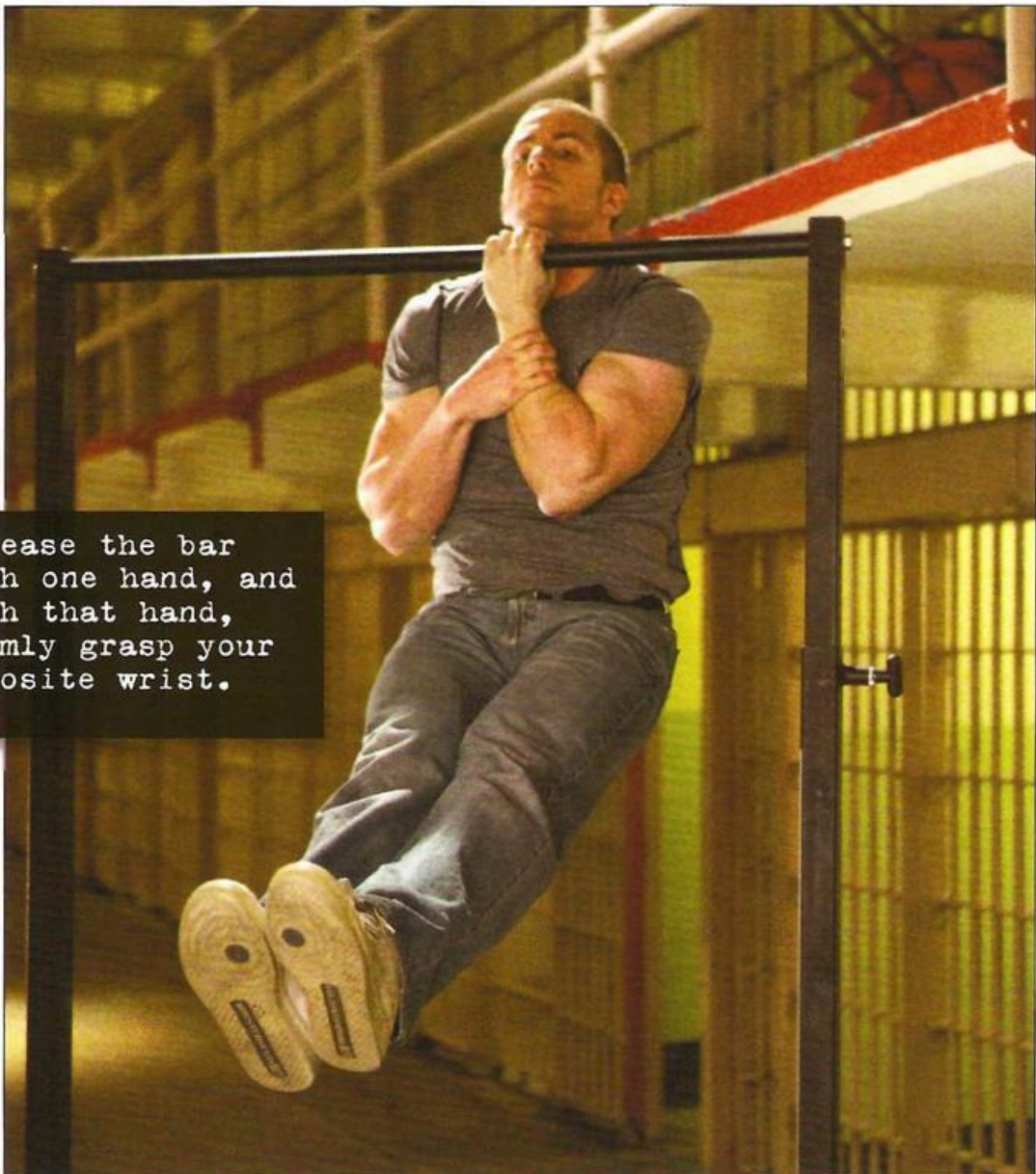
STEP 7: UNEVEN PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

The pullup program so far will have conditioned all your back muscles, and a course of close pullups will have done a lot to make your arm flexors more powerful. But so far we've been hanging from *two* hands. If you want to progress further towards one-arm work, you'll need to train your fingers and grip so that you can hold your bodyweight comfortably while hanging from just *one* hand. Uneven pullups are an exercise which allow an athlete to hang from a single hand, while still getting some assistance in the actual lift from the opposite arm. As a result, uneven pullups make for a perfect transitional exercise prior to moving on to pure unilateral, or one-arm, pullup exercises.

BASIC POSTURE

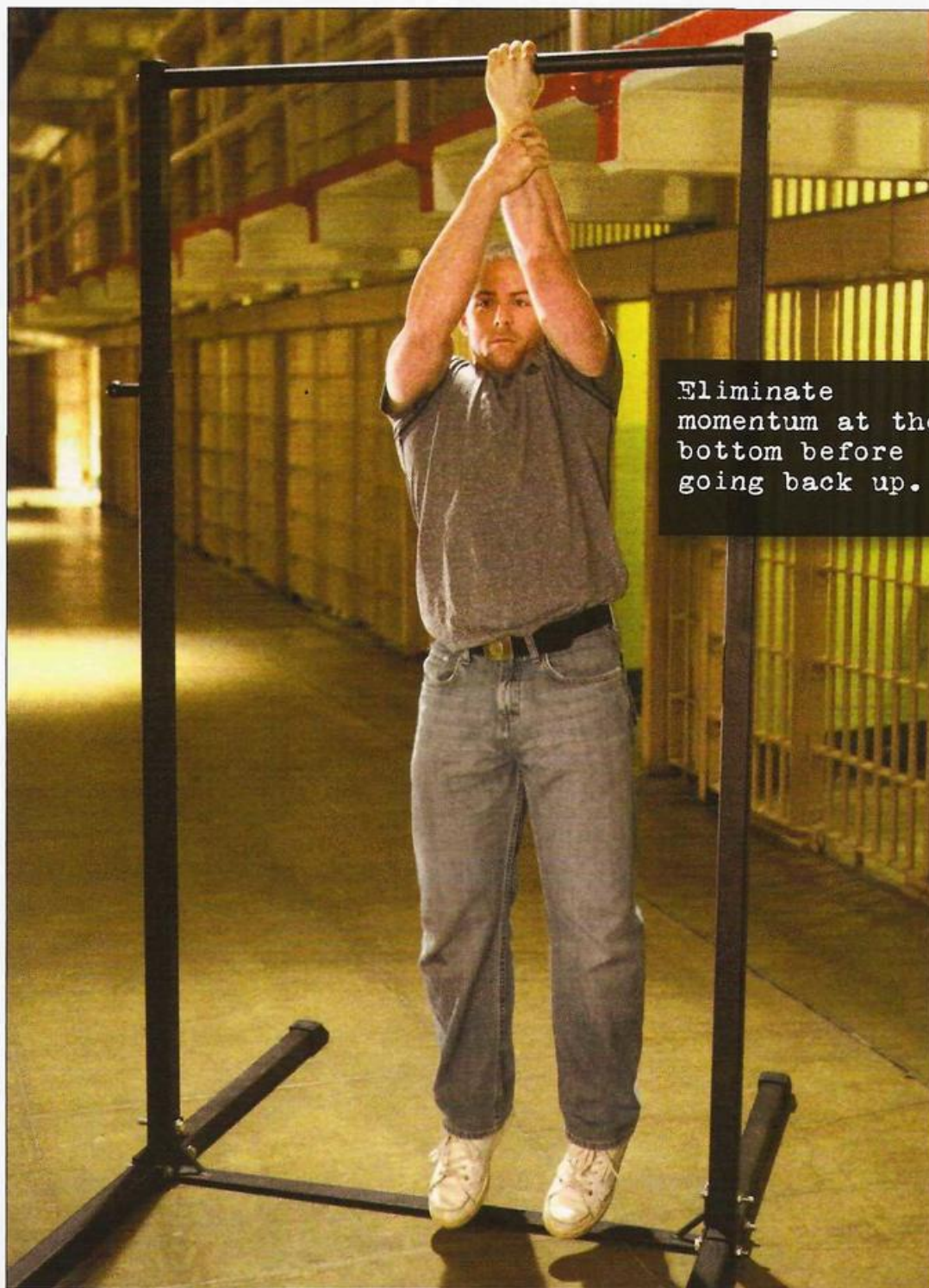
- For this exercise you'll need a high horizontal bar.
- Grab the bar with a fairly close underhand grip, and jump up until you are in the top position, with your chin over the bar.
- Release the bar with one hand, and with that hand, firmly grasp your opposite wrist.
- Despite the unsymmetrical position, still keep your shoulders "tight".
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.



Release the bar with one hand, and with that hand, firmly grasp your opposite wrist.

NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until both arms are nearly straight.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly lift yourself up by pulling hard with both arms.
- Try not to kick or jerk your legs; keep your lower body as still as possible.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count, before repeating the exercise.

"HIDDEN STEPS" **UNEVEN PULLUPS**

- The closer your support grip is to your hanging hand and wrist, the easier the exercise
- The lower down your arm the support grip, the tougher the exercise becomes

To make this exercise easier, you can begin by looping your supporting hand over the top of the hand which is gripping the bar. This variation makes for a smoother transition from close pullups. Move your support hand down to your wrist as you get used to the movement.

PROGRESSION LEVELS **UNEVEN PULLUPS**

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 5 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 7 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 9 reps |

With this step, we are moving towards more pure strength work, so we'll be using lower reps. Start this exercise with one set of 5 strict reps, and gradually add reps as you get stronger. When you can perform 7 strict reps, add a second set of 5. Build to two sets of 9.

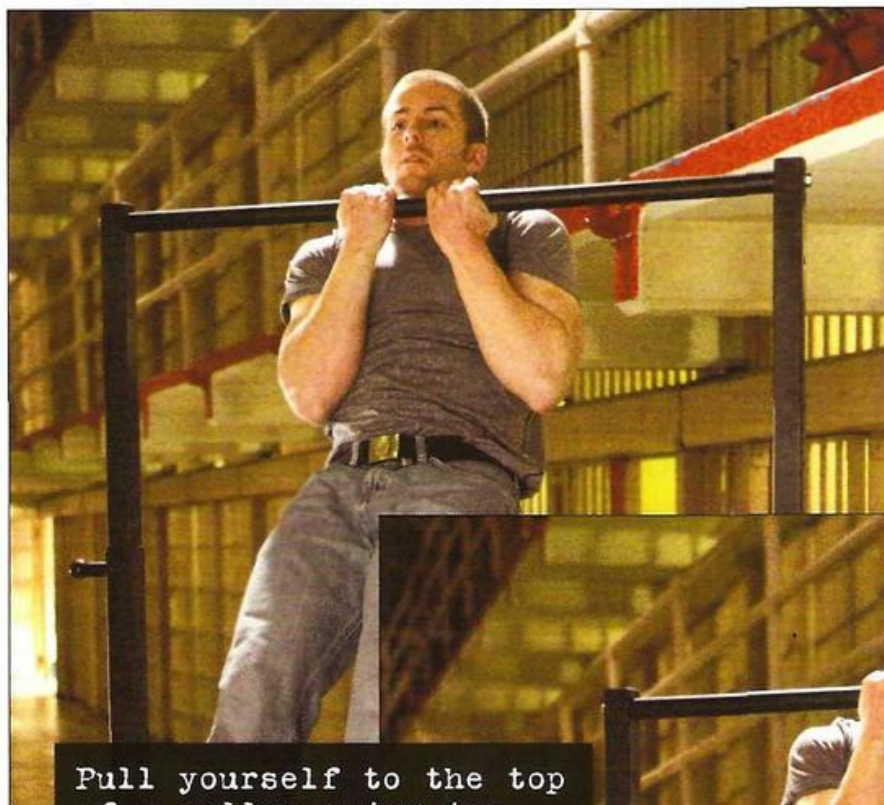
STEP 8: ½ ONE-ARM PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

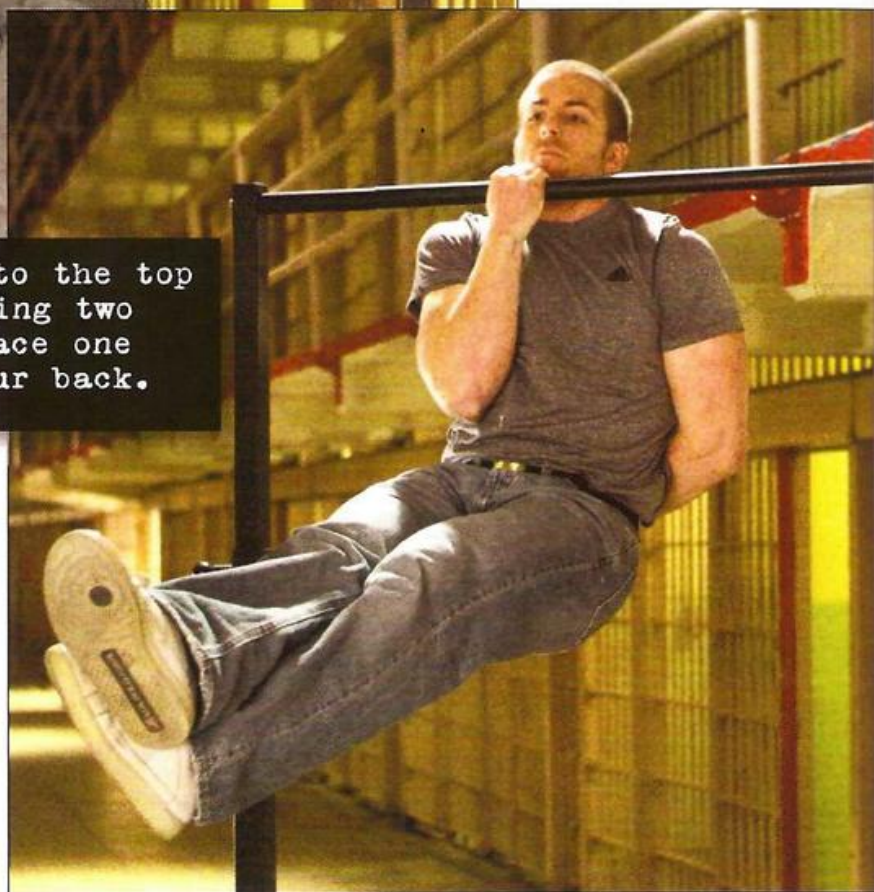
Once you've mastered uneven pullups, you will have graduated to the point where you can seriously explore one-handed pullup variations. At this stage it's a good idea to begin using partial exercises to allow your back, arm, and tendon strength to develop. The fundamental exercises to learn are ¼ one-arm pullups, eventually working up to ½ one-arm pullups as your strength increases. For this step, we'll skip ahead and discuss ½ one-arm pullups. As well as building huge strength and muscle, this exercise will also teach you the unique body positioning skills required for true one-arm pullups. Because this exercise doesn't work your muscles in the stretched position, it's a good idea to finish any partial or half pullup workout with one or two sets of a full pullup movement, such as regular or close pullups.

BASIC POSTURE

- For this exercise you'll need the high horizontal bar high.
- Pull yourself to the top of a pullup using two hands, then place one hand behind your back.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.

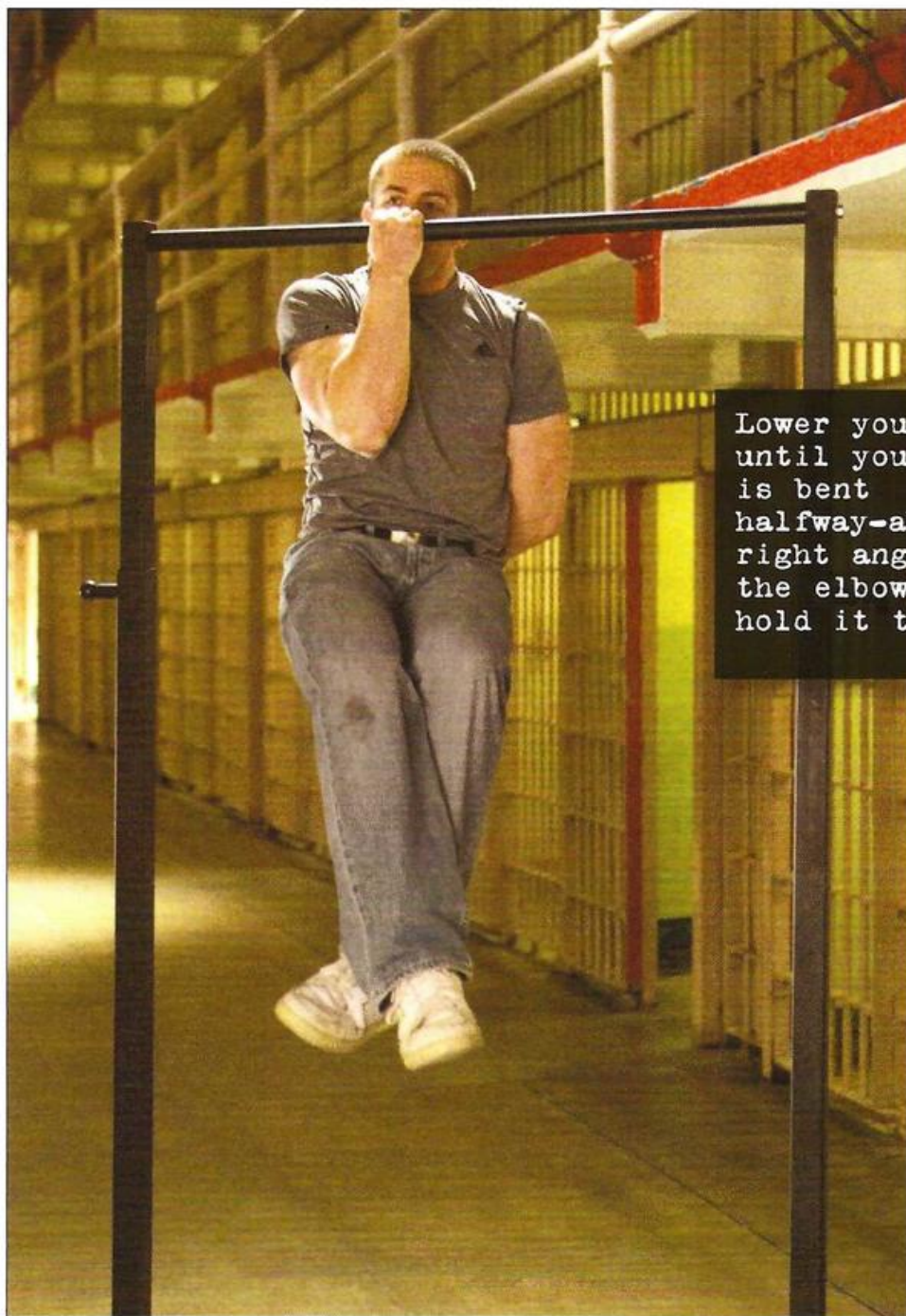


Pull yourself to the top of a pullup using two hands, then place one hand behind your back.



NEGATIVE

- Begin to slowly lower yourself down.
- Lower yourself until your arm is bent halfway—about a right angle at the elbow—and hold it there.
- Eliminate momentum at the bottom before going back up.



Lower yourself until your arm is bent halfway—about a right angle at the elbow—and hold it there.

POSITIVE

- Smoothly pull yourself back up using only the one arm.
- Some “kipping” with the legs is permissible now.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count, before repeating the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” 1/2 ONE-ARM PULLUPS

- If the half pullup is too difficult, reduce the range of motion until you gain strength
- A greater range of motion, slower negatives and a longer pause at the bottom will all make your workouts more productive at this stage

Athletes are advised to begin working with $\frac{1}{4}$ one-arm pullups in the top range and add depth over time. Just add a fraction of inch of depth whenever you can, and before too long you'll achieve the correct range-of-motion required for $\frac{1}{2}$ one-arm pullups.

PROGRESSION LEVELS 1/2 ONE-ARM PULLUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 4 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 6 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 8 reps |

You should shoot for 4 reps of this exercise before you begin working with it seriously. Add a rep to your work set whenever you can, until you can perform 6 reps. At that point add a second set of 4. Build up to two sets of 8 reps, before moving on to Step 9, assisted one-arm pullups.

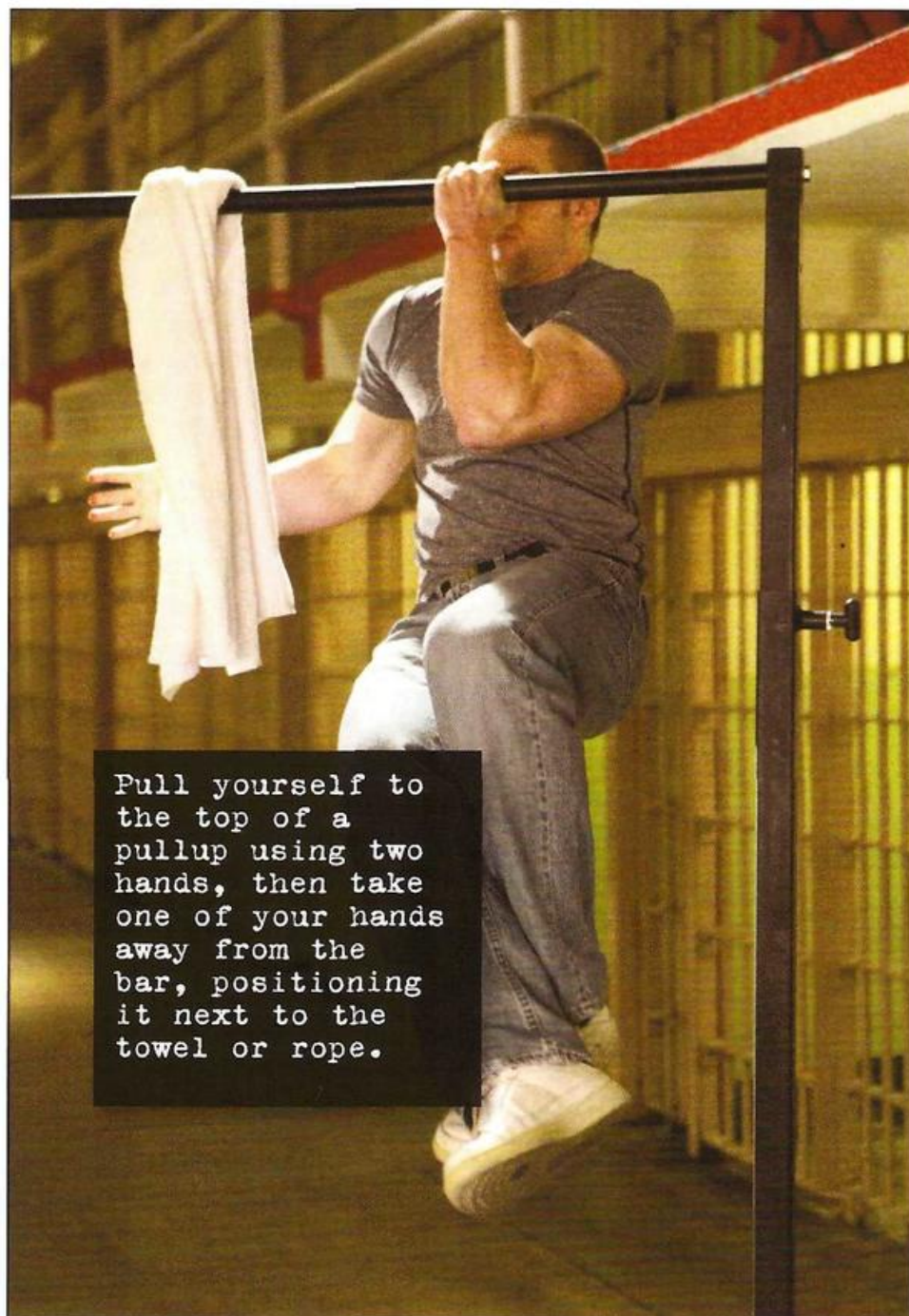
STEP 9: ASSISTED ONE-ARM PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

If you have met the progression standard for this last step, you are already expert in the top half of the one-arm pullup. Unfortunately, due to the physics of leverage, the bottom half of all pullup movements are exponentially harder than the top half. For this reason, you can be very good at top half one-arm pullups, yet be completely unable to perform a full one-arm pullup, because the bottom half of the movement is just too difficult. It makes logical, progressive sense that the next step of this series should train the athlete in the bottom range of motion. Assisted one-arm pullups do this. They allow you to perform full one-arm pullups, with some assist from your non-pulling arm—but only in the bottom position. This method will allow you to work through the bottom half without straining your tendons, while still completing the top half without help.

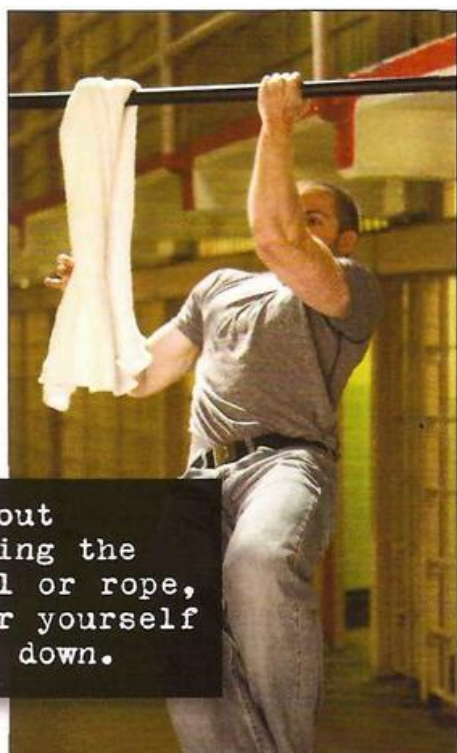
BASIC POSTURE

- For this exercise you'll return to the high horizontal bar. Throw a towel or piece of rope over the bar above side where your non-working arm would be.
- Pull yourself to the top of a pullup using two hands, then take one of your hands away from the bar, positioning it next to the towel or rope.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.

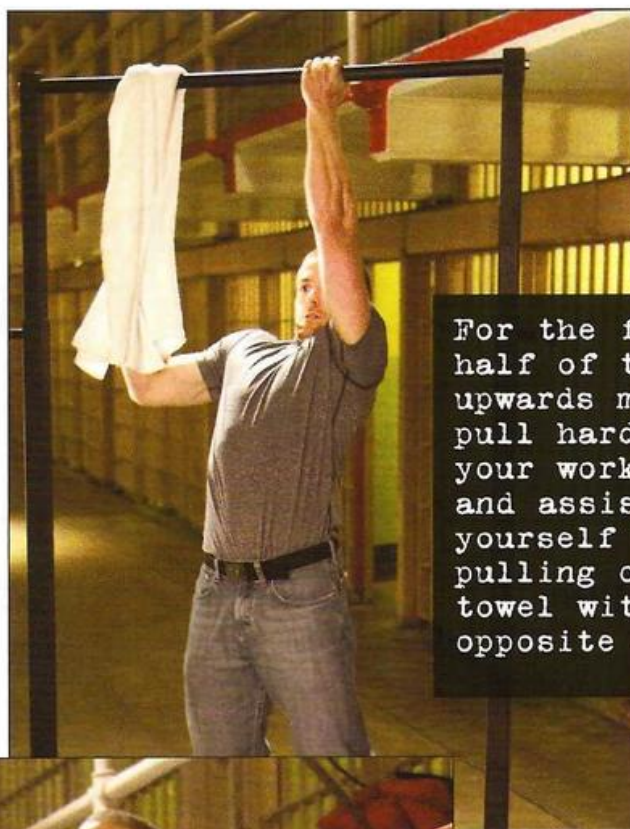


NEGATIVE

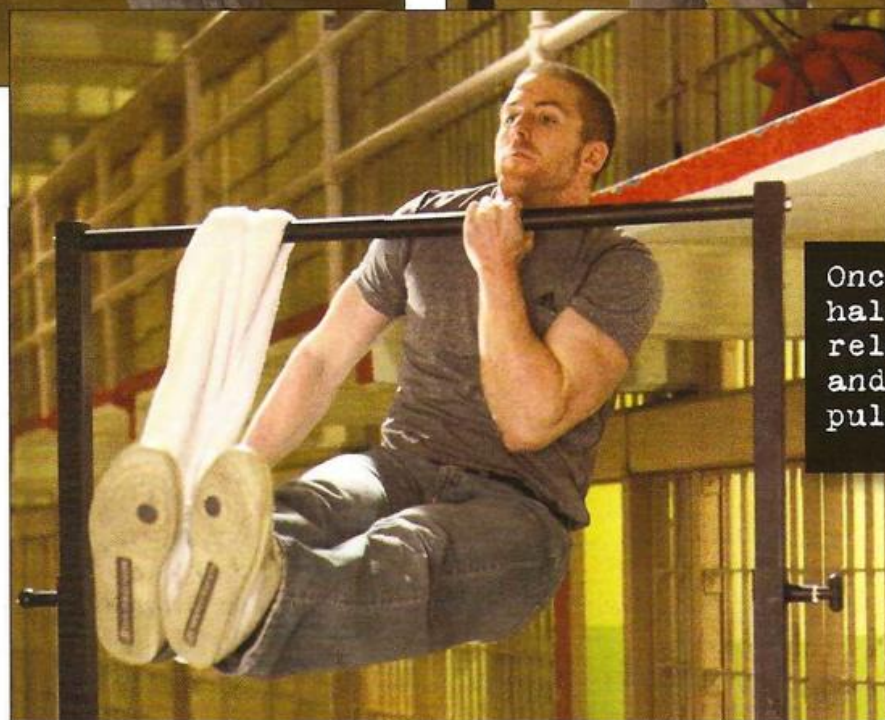
- Without holding the towel or rope, lower yourself back down until your working arm is straight, or close to straight.
- Pause very briefly the bottom, to take hold of the towel or rope.



Without holding the towel or rope, lower yourself back down.



For the first half of the upwards movement, pull hard with your working arm and assist yourself by pulling on the towel with your opposite arm.



Once your arm is halfway bent, release the towel and complete the pullup one-handed.

POSITIVE

- For the first half of the upwards movement, pull hard with your working arm and assist yourself by pulling on the towel with your opposite arm.
- Once your arm is halfway bent, release the towel and complete the pullup one-handed.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold this position for a one count, before repeating the exercise.

“HIDDEN STEPS” ASSISTED ONE-ARM PULLUPS

- The more you bend your assisting arm, the more force you can generate, making the exercise easier
- Keeping your assisting arm straight as you push down makes the exercise harder

This movement is very variable, because the amount of assistance you give yourself is totally up to you. You can ease yourself into this exercise by pulling down on the rope or towel with a fairly bent arm. Over time, you should try to straighten out your arm—this will give you more of a feeling of “pushing” down and make the exercise much harder.

PROGRESSION LEVELS ASSISTED ONE-ARM PULLUPS

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------|
| • BEGINNER STANDARD: | 1 set of 3 reps |
| • INTERMEDIATE STANDARD: | 2 sets of 5 reps |
| • PROGRESSION STANDARD: | 2 sets of 7 reps |

Begin your training in this exercise with one set of 3 strict reps, and gradually add reps from workout to workout. When you can perform 5 strict reps, add a second set of 3. Build up to two sets of 7 reps, before moving on to Step 10, full one-arm pullups.

STEP 10: **MASTER STEP** ONE-ARM PULLUPS

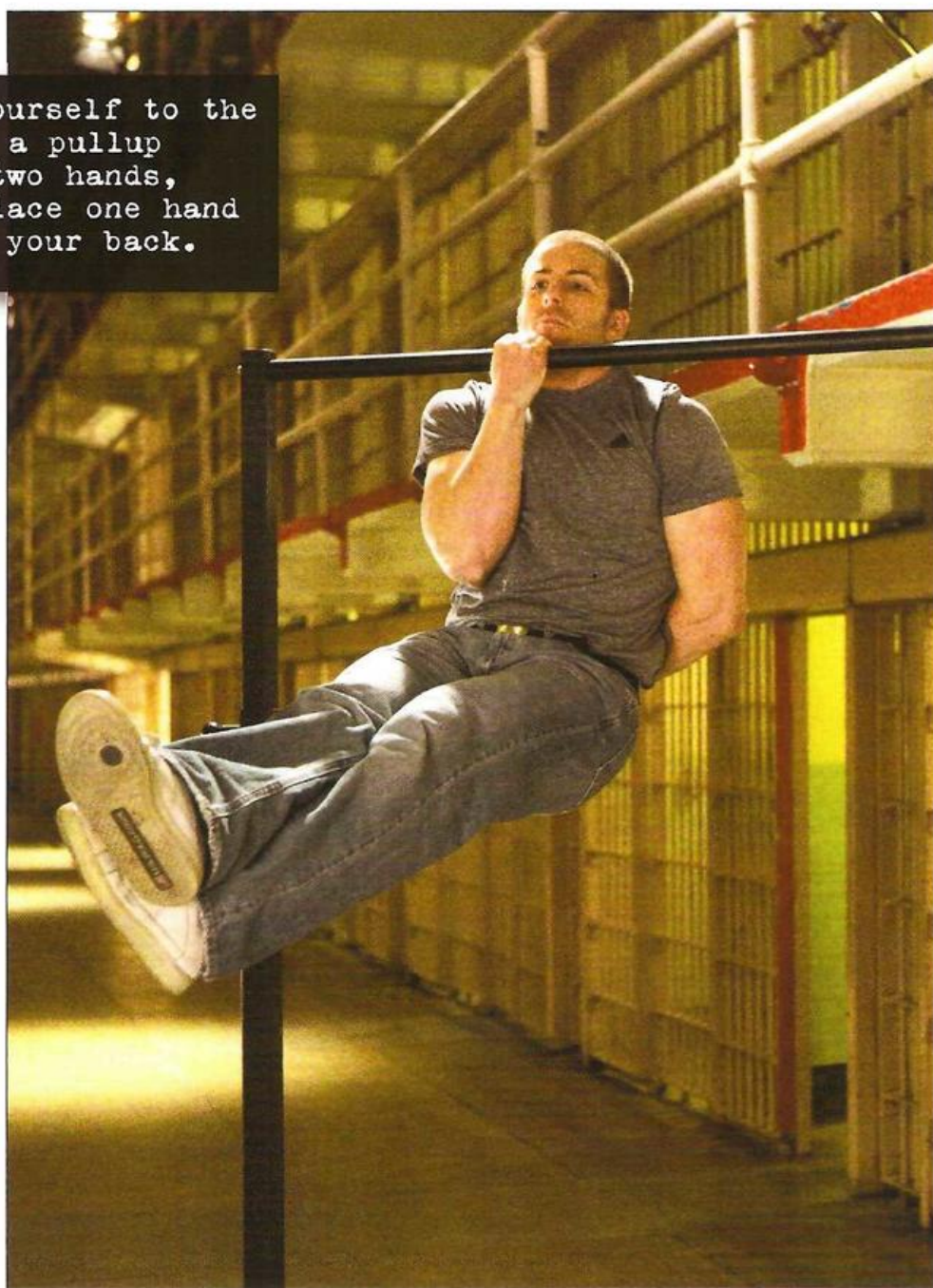
OVERVIEW

The final step of this series is the infamous one-arm pullup. This is the Master Step of all pullups. There's a good reason for this—only a handful of individuals in the world are capable of performing one-arm pullups. Once you get to this level, you will be one of the greatest exponents of bodyweight training on the planet. You'll have a back as proportionately powerful as an Olympic champion, and your grip and biceps will be strong enough to rip the average bodybuilder's arm off in an arm wrestling match. Getting to this stage requires years of consistent training, competent injury prevention, extremely hard work, dedication and very low body fat. But it can be done, and often by genetically quite average, drug-free athletes.

BASIC POSTURE

- For this exercise you'll need the high horizontal bar high.
- Pull yourself to the top of a pullup using two hands, then place one hand behind your back.
- Your feet should be looped behind you and clear of the ground.

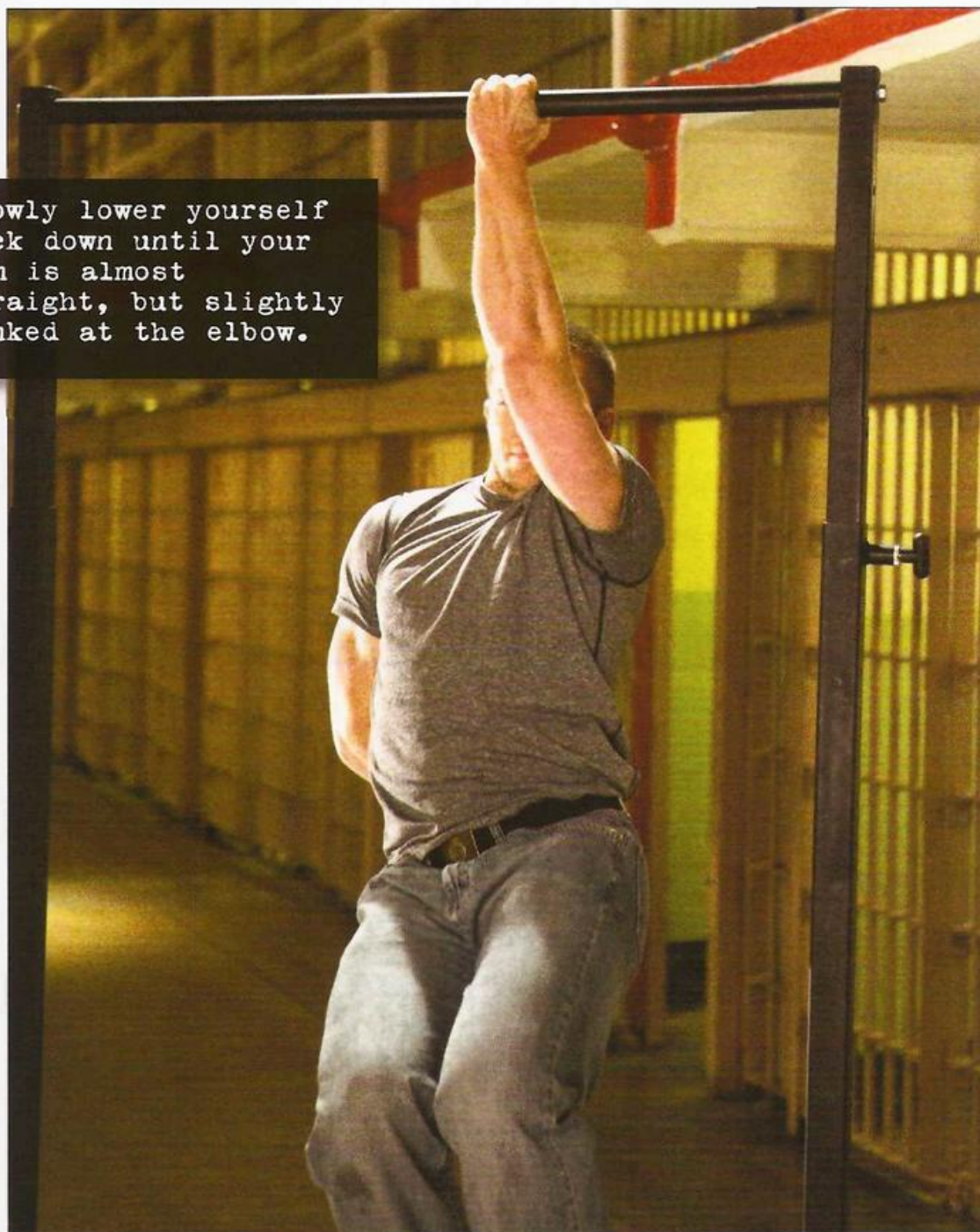
Pull yourself to the top of a pullup using two hands, then place one hand behind your back.



NEGATIVE

- Slowly lower yourself back down until your arm is almost straight, but slightly kinked at the elbow.
- Reverse your motion as quickly as you can at the bottom.

Slowly lower yourself back down until your arm is almost straight, but slightly kinked at the elbow.



POSITIVE

- Pull yourself up by pulling hard with your working arm.
- "Kipping" the legs is permissible during this exercise to gain some beginning momentum.
- Stop when your chin passes over the bar.
- Hold the top position for a one count.

PULLUP SERIES SUMMARY

For ease of reference, let's take a look at the ten steps of the pullup series all together.

STEP 1: VERTICAL PULLS

Step one: Vertical pulls. Build to three sets of forty. Then begin;

STEP 2: HORIZONTAL PULLS

Step two: Horizontal pulls. Build to three sets of thirty. Then move to;

STEP 3: JACKKNIFE PULLUPS

Step three: Jackknife pullups. Build to three sets of twenty. Then begin;

STEP 4: HALF PULLUPS

Step four: Half pullups. Build to two sets of fifteen. Then move to;

STEP 5: FULL PULLUPS

Step five: Full pullups. Build to two sets of ten. Then begin;

STEP 6: CLOSE PULLUPS

Step six: Close pullups. Build to two sets of ten. Then start;

STEP 7: UNEVEN PULLUPS

Step seven: Uneven pullups. Build to two sets of nine. Then move to;

STEP 8: $\frac{1}{2}$ ONE-ARM PULLUPS

Step eight: $\frac{1}{2}$ one-arm pullups. Build to two sets of eight. Then go to;

STEP 9: ASSISTED ONE-ARM PULLUPS

Step nine: Assisted one-arm pullups. Build to two sets of seven. Then finally advance to;

STEP 10: MASTER STEP ONE-ARM PULLUPS

Step ten; you've reached the Master Step: One-arm pullups.

CELL 3:
THE
VARIANTS



CELL 3: THE VARIANTS

If you get to the stage where you can do a one-arm pullup, you've reached a world-class status of strength. As far as pulling power goes, you'll have all you need. But that doesn't mean there aren't other great exercises for you to pick up. We're going to show you a few movements which fall outside the ten steps, but which can potentially really enhance your workouts if you use them right.

All the DVDs in this series contain some variant exercises for you to explore. But don't get too caught up by the term "variants". In the Convict Conditioning system athletes are encouraged to really master a few exceptional exercises they can use alongside the fundamental movement types. These are not meant to *replace* pushups, pullups or whatever, and they're not meant to be exact replicas which work the same way. If these exercises worked exactly the same as pullups, there'd be no point learning them—you'd be repeating yourself. But it's always good to know a few extra movements for variety, to build explosive power or fresh muscle. Let's look at some more moves.

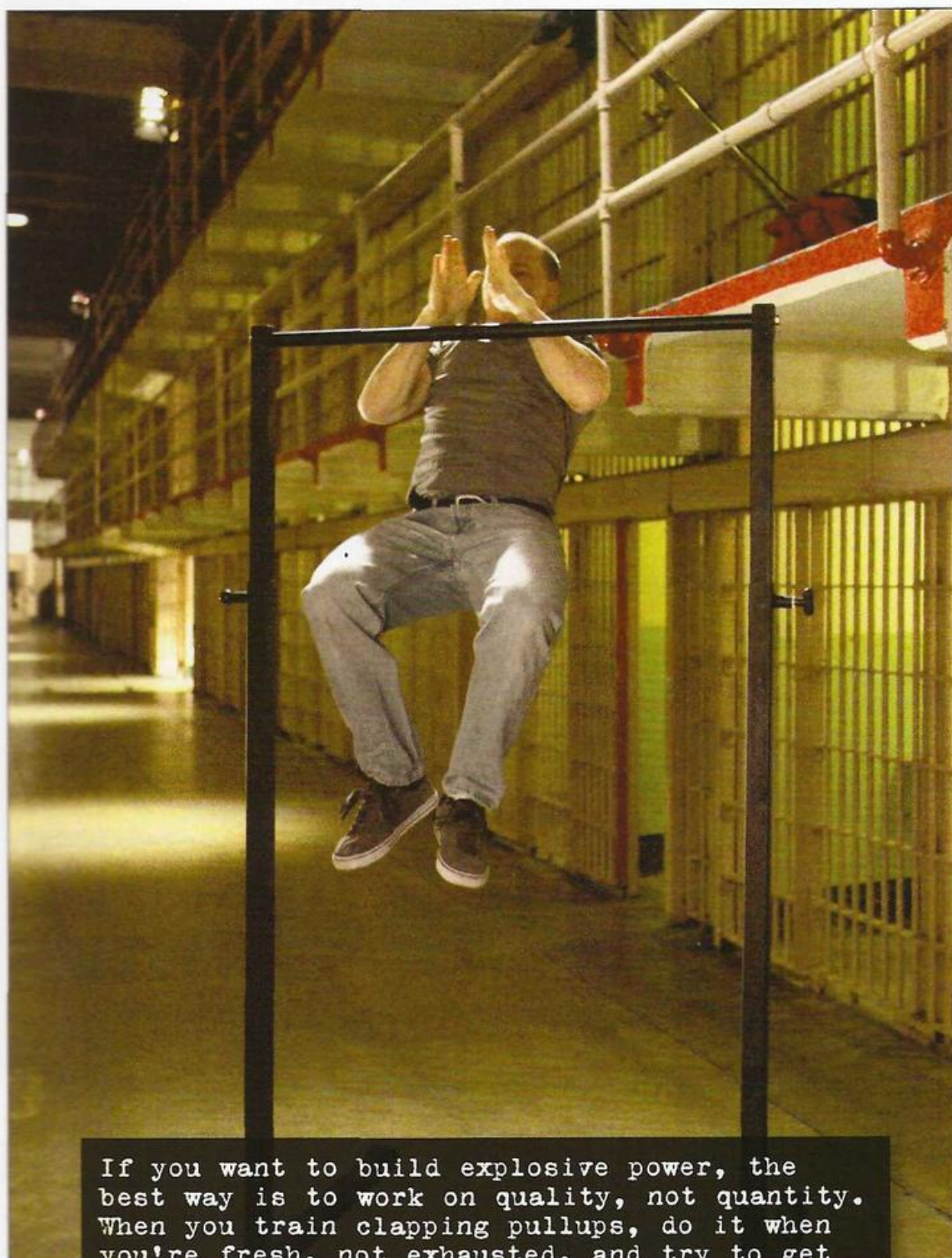
CLAPPING PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

Most of the Convict Conditioning exercises are performed to build pure strength, without momentum. But it's always good to have mastered an explosive version of any movement, in case you want to work on your speed and power. Pullups are no exception. Just as the basic plyometric version of the pushup is the clapping pushup, it's true that the most fundamental speed and power drill for pullups is clapping pullups. Clapping pullups work exactly as they sound. You perform a pullup, and clap your hands at the top. To get the momentum to do this, you really need to be explosive. Pull yourself up as high and hard as you can, and don't be afraid of kipping your legs and swinging your body as you go. The best plyo exercises tend to be total body explosions. Let's see how it's done.

TRAINING IDEAS

If you want to build explosive power, the best way is to work on quality, not quantity. When you train clapping pullups, do it when you're fresh, not exhausted, and try to get the most powerful, crisp reps you can. When your form starts to break down, take a rest. A few sets of three to five really explosive reps will charge up your nervous system much better than a set of twenty reps, when most of them are slow and sluggish.

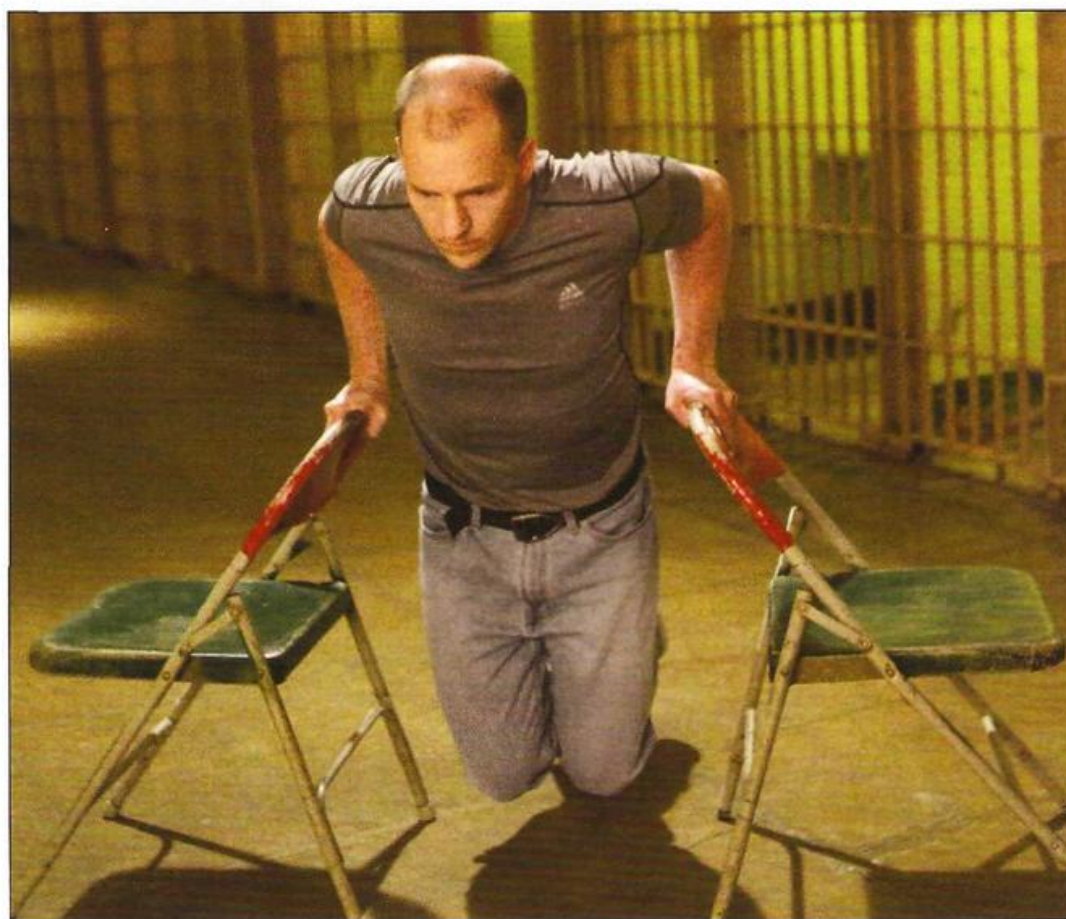


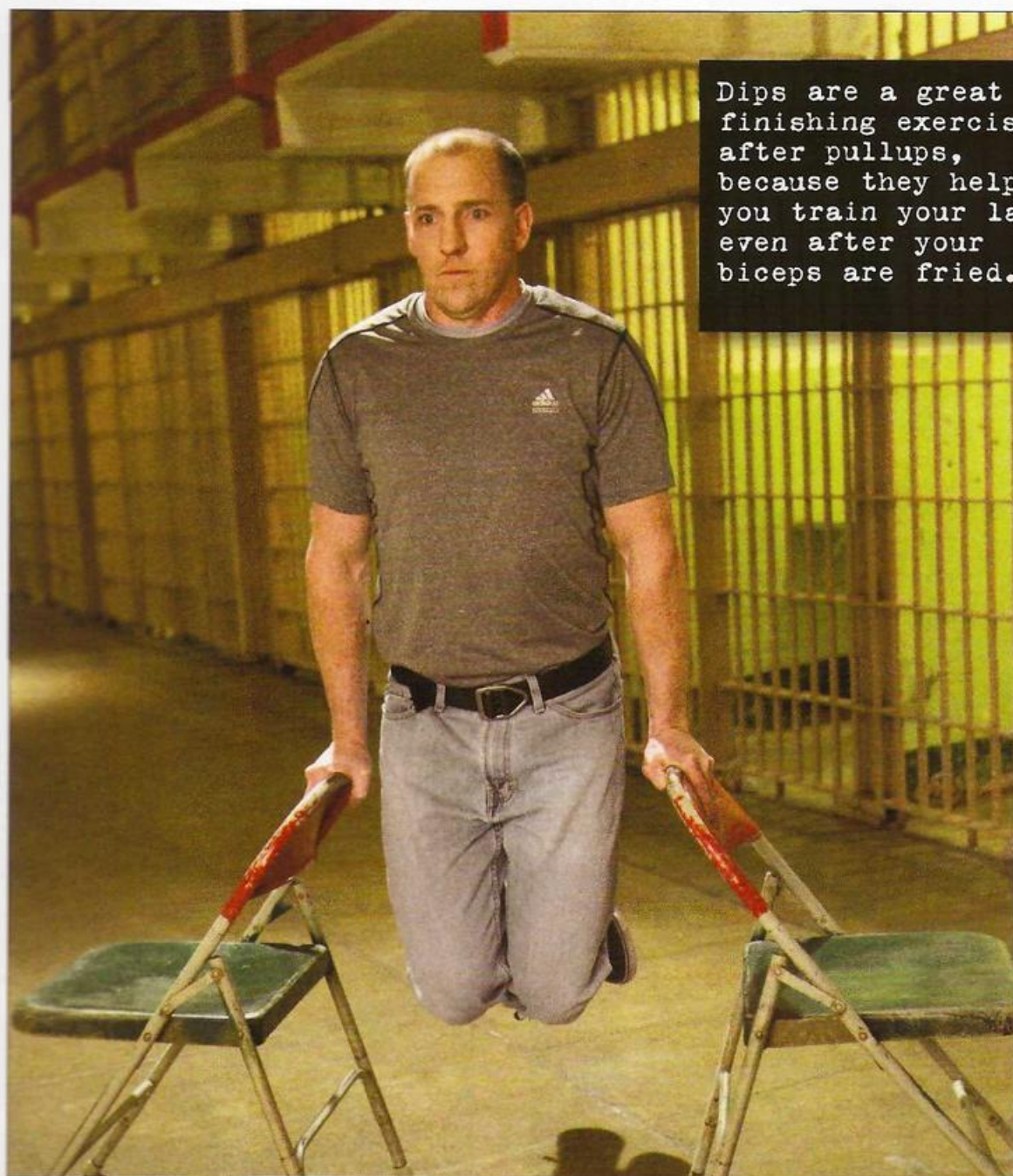
If you want to build explosive power, the best way is to work on quality, not quantity. When you train clapping pullups, do it when you're fresh, not exhausted, and try to get the most powerful, crisp reps you can.

DIPS

OVERVIEW

The next alternative to pullups we're going to show you is the traditional dip. Dips don't look like pullups—you press your body up, rather than pull it—but because, as for pullups, the force is going laterally straight down, you work the big torso muscles, the lats, in a similar way. Whereas pullups primarily work the lats, back and biceps, dips work the lats, pecs and triceps. Once you're using bodyweight, pullups and dips are a classic combination to pack a huge amount of muscle on the torso and arms. Dips can be done on parallel bars, or even using the backs of two chairs if they're sturdy enough.





Dips are a great finishing exercise after pullups, because they help you train your lats even after your biceps are fried.

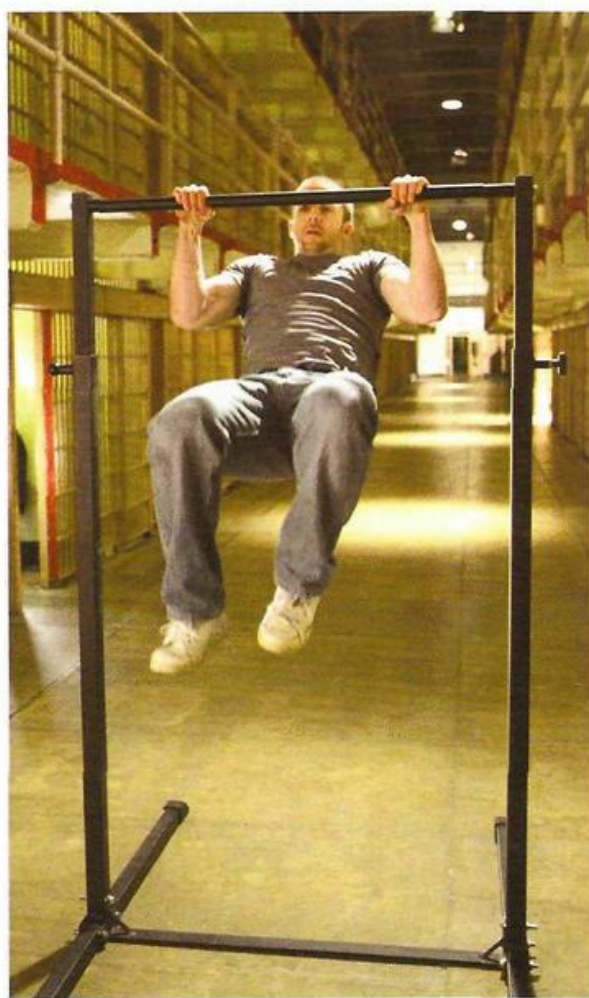
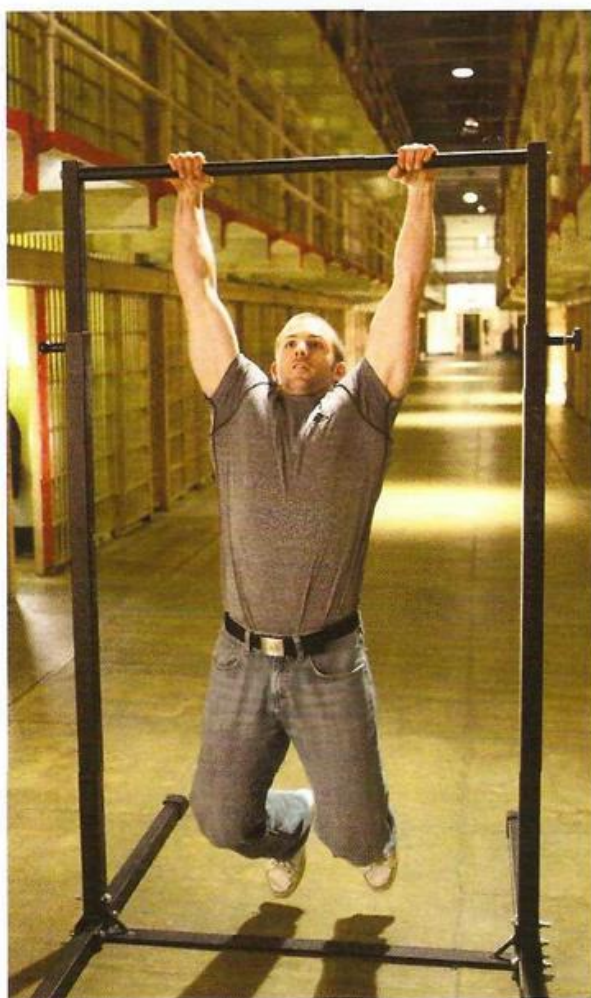
TRAINING IDEAS

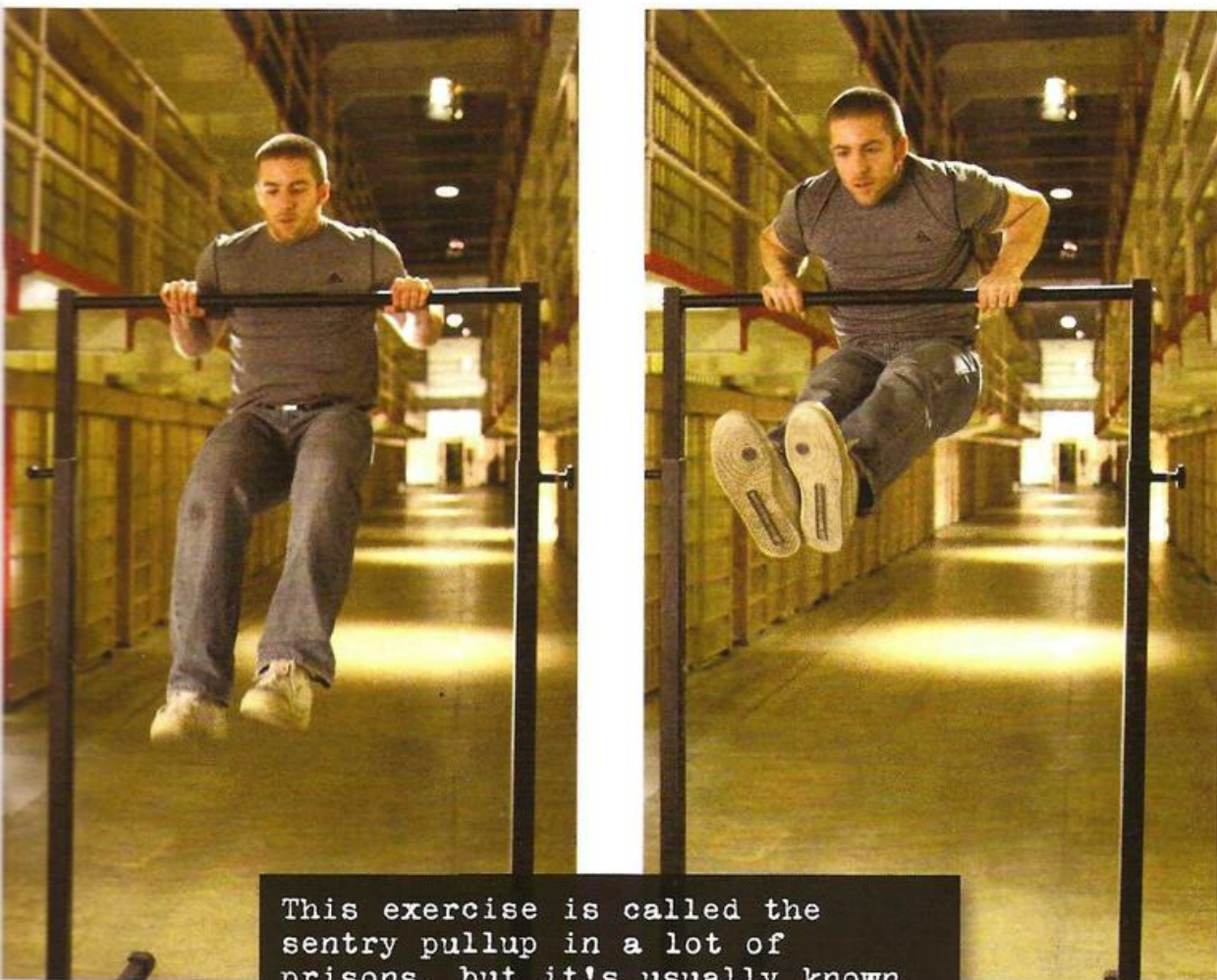
Dips are a great finishing exercise after pullups, because they help you train your lats even after your biceps are fried. Just grit your teeth and push out as many as you can. If you want to focus on the exercise to build strength, you can start progressively with your feet up on something to make things easier. Build your reps before allowing your feet to hang down, to get your joints used to the exercise. You can make dips harder by using a wider grip or adding weight, but it's more sensible to just perfect your form over time to make things harder. Use a good range of motion and eliminate momentum and bodyweight dips will challenge even strong guys.

SENTRY PULLUPS

OVERVIEW

When you get to the stage where you can perform clapping pushups and dips quite well, you might want to consider a very advanced upper body exercise which combines both these great moves. You go for an explosive pullup, but instead of clapping at the top, you flip your elbows up so that they are above the bar, and push your body up from there like a dip. This exercise is called the sentry pullup in a lot of prisons, but it's usually known as the muscle-up on the outside. Let's see it.

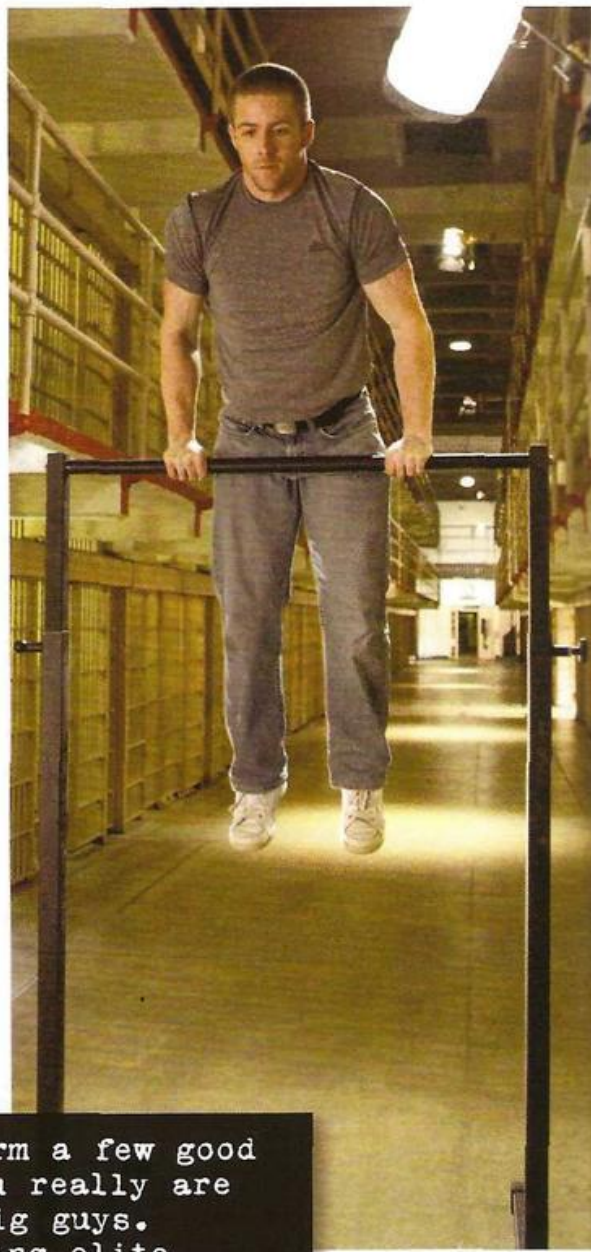
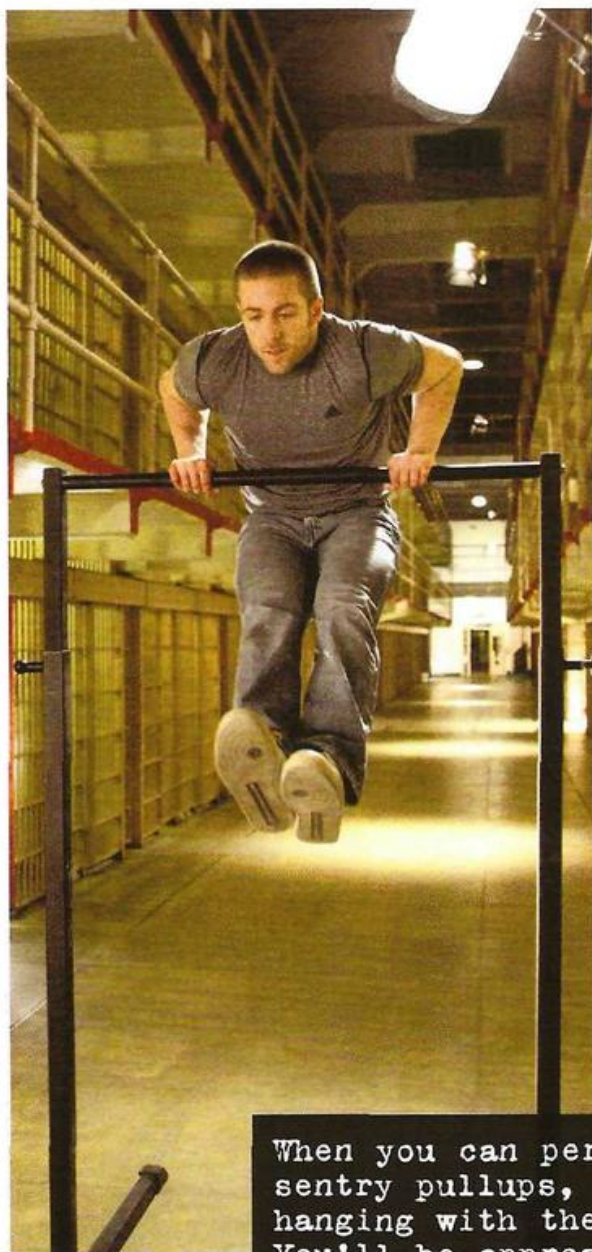




This exercise is called the sentry pullup in a lot of prisons, but it's usually known as the muscle-up on the outside.

TRAINING IDEAS

The sentry pullup is an incredible move. It builds generates explosive power in the trunk, and upper body, and builds huge strength in every single muscle of the torso and arms. It's also incredibly functional—you are really doing something impressive with your body. When you can perform a few good sentry pullups, you really are hanging with the big guys. You'll be approaching elite level bodyweight ability.



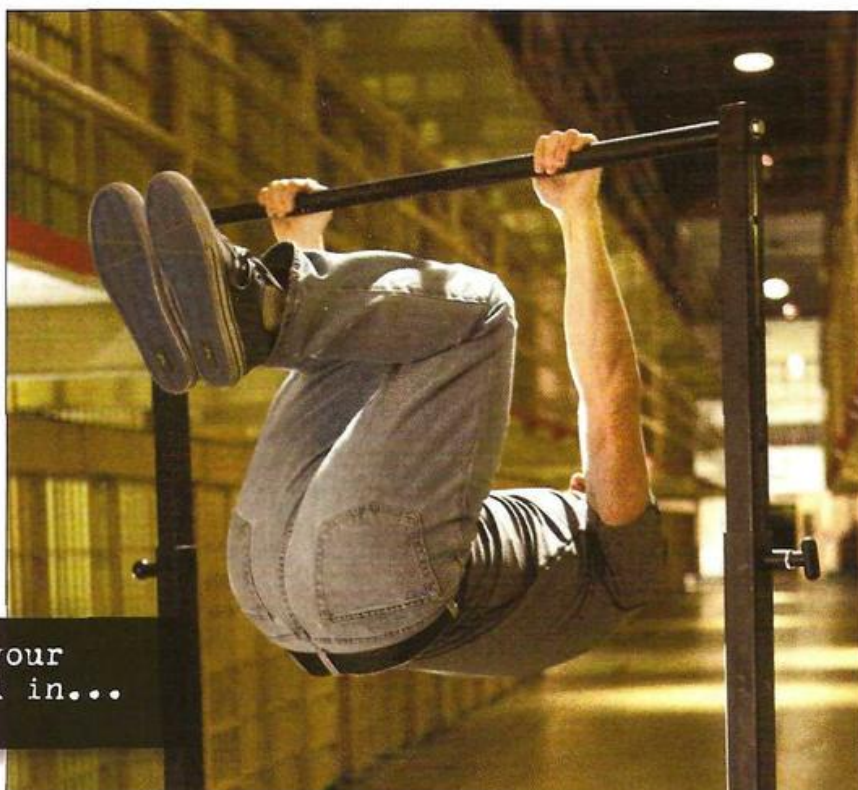
When you can perform a few good sentry pullups, you really are hanging with the big guys. You'll be approaching elite level bodyweight ability.

REVERSE PLANCHE

OVERVIEW

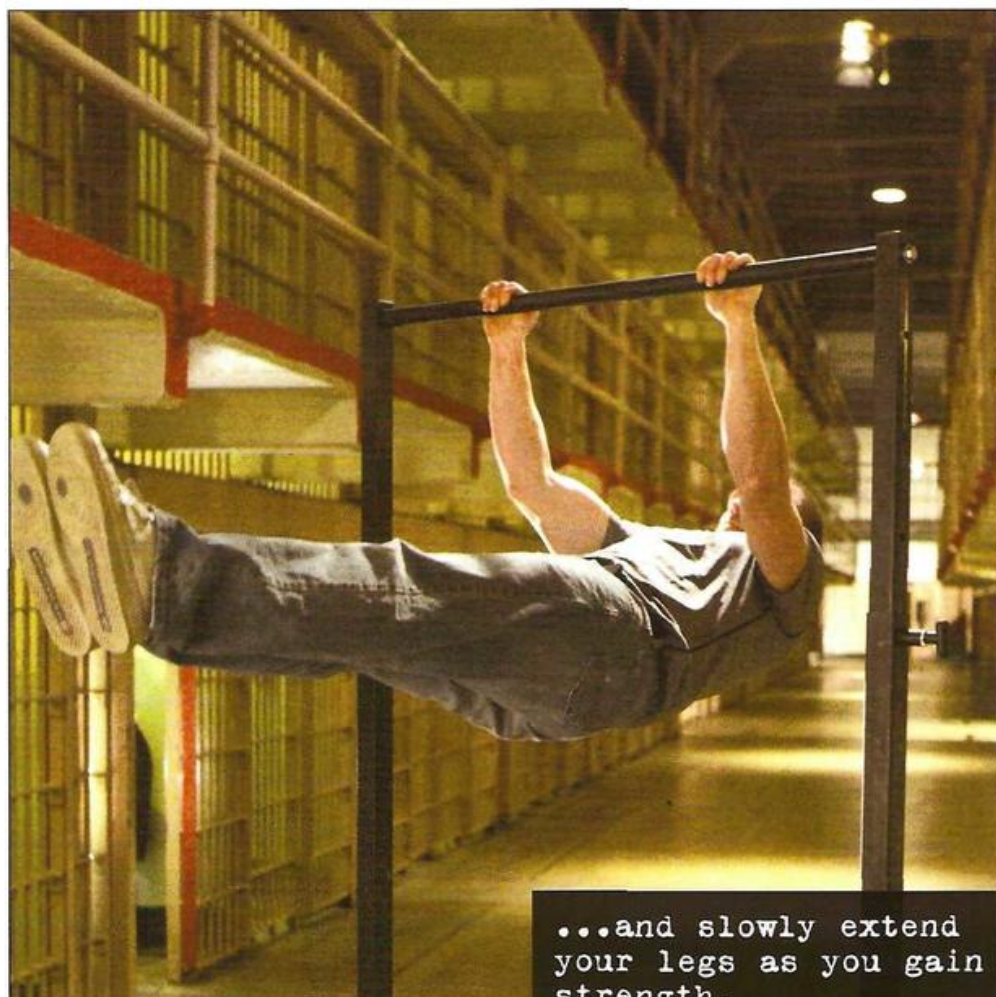
It's always good to have a static variant in your box of tricks for every movement you do. The pullup is no different. The best static movement you can do for your upper back and pulling muscles is sometimes called the reverse planche in jails. On the outside, it's more commonly known as a front lever. The goal of the reverse planche is to hang from a bar with your arms straight and your body horizontal. This takes a lot of training. To get there, you need to take small steps. Athletes should begin to learn this hold in the easiest position; with bent legs, tucked in over your chest, like this:

This bent leg position is sometimes called the "tuck" position. Start off by holding this position for as long as you can. Even if you have great arm and back pulling strength from pullups, you'll find it takes your trunk muscles a little while to gain the strength to lock your legs in place.



Begin with your
knees tucked in...

When this beginner version gets easy, start to unfold your legs. Soon you'll be able to hold the position with your knees a little way out from your chest. Then beyond your elbows, but still bent. When that gets easy, try straightening your legs out some more. Eventually, you'll be able to straighten your body fully, and achieve a perfect reverse planche, like this.



...and slowly extend
your legs as you gain
strength.

TRAINING IDEAS

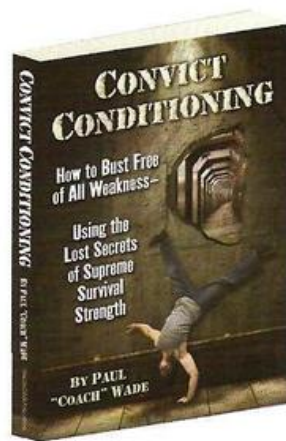
Once you become comfortable in this advanced stage, you can even do pullups from this position if you want.

That's a pretty impressive sight you won't see in most gyms! The reverse planche requires a lot of strength in the back muscles, joints, and trunk. It can take years to learn perfectly. The key, as with all bodyweight feats of strength lies in breaking the technique up into manageable progressions. Do this with the reverse planche, and you'll master it quicker than athletes who try to jump straight in without a plan. Progression is king in all bodyweight movements.

OUTRO

There you have it—every technique and nuance you need for a lifetime of pullup training. Now you just need to put it into practice. There are plenty of routine and programming ideas in the “extras” section of this DVD series, as well as in the *Convict Conditioning* book. The forum at dragondoor.com is also a number one resource for all things Convict Conditioning.

But if you want to truly become a master of the one-arm pullup, you'll want to know how to train for the opposite, antagonistic move so you can train every single muscle in your upper body to perfection. We're talking about the one-arm handstand pushup. That's the subject of the sixth and final DVD of the Convict Conditioning series: *Beyond Power: The One-Arm Handstand Pushup Series*.



Enjoy. And until next time, keep doing those pullups!

Tap into the Dormant Ancestral Power of the Mighty Pullup—to Develop a Massive Upper Back, Steel-Tendon Arms, Etched Abs and Agile Survival Strength

Paul Wade's *Convict Conditioning* system represents the ultimate distillation of hardcore prison bodyweight training's most powerful methods. What works was kept. What didn't, was slashed away. When your life is on the line, you're not going to mess with less than the absolute best. Many of these older, very potent solitary training systems have been on the verge of dying, as convicts begin to gain access to weights, and modern "bodybuilding thinking" floods into the prisons. Thanks to Paul Wade, these ultimate strength survival secrets have been saved for posterity. And for you...

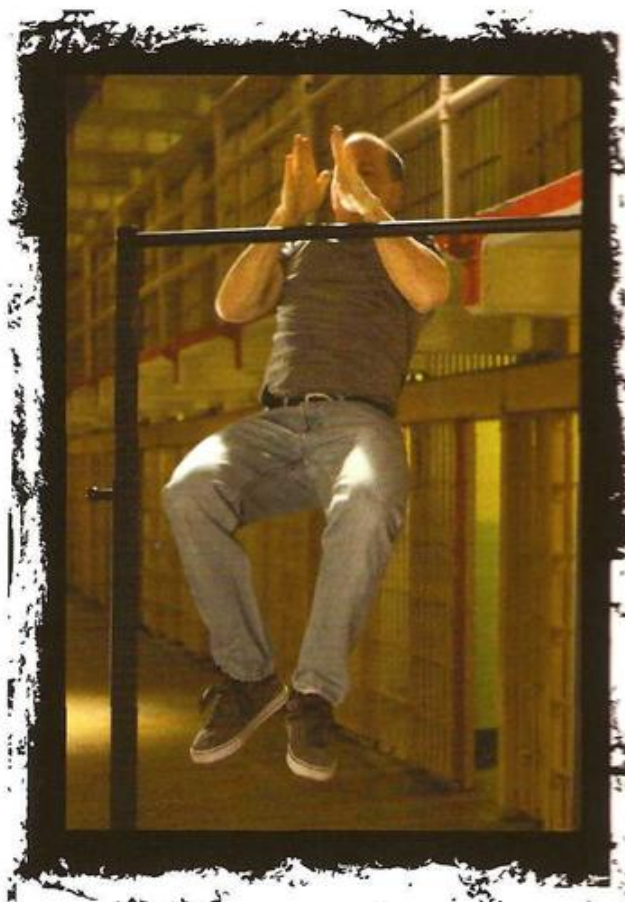
Filmed entirely—and so appropriately—on "The Rock", Wade's *Convict Conditioning Volume 5, Maximum Strength: The One-Arm Pullup Series* explodes out of the cellblock to teach you in absolute detail how to progress from the relative ease of a Vertical Pull—to the stunning, "1-in-1,000" achievement of the One-Arm Pullup. Ten progressive steps guide you to inevitable mastery of this ultimate exercise for supreme upper body survival strength.

This home-study course in ultimate survival strength comes replete with bonus material not available in Paul Wade's original *Convict Conditioning* book—and numerous key training tips that refine and expand on the original program.

Prowl through the heavily and gorgeously-illustrated 80-plus-page manual and devour the entire film script at your animal leisure. Digest the brilliant, precise photographs and reinforce the raw benefits you absorbed from the DVD.

Paul Wade adds a bonus Ten Commandments for Perfect Pullups—which is worth the price of admission alone. And there's the additional bonus of 4 major Variant drills to add explosivity, fun and super-strength to your core practice.

Whatever you are looking for from your pullups—be it agile survival strength, arms of steel, a massive upper back with flaring lats, Popeye Biceps or gape-inducing abs—it's yours for the progressive taking with *Convict Conditioning Volume 5, Maximum Strength: The One-Arm Pullup Series*.



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